

The Classical in the Contemporary: Contemporary Art in Britain and its Relationships with Greco-Roman Antiquity

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Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma, or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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Summary

Title: The Classical in the Contemporary: Contemporary Art in Britain and its Relationships with Greco-Roman Antiquity.

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My thesis is titled 'The Classical in the Contemporary: Contemporary Art in Britain and its Relationships with Greco-Roman Antiquity.' From the viewpoint of classical reception studies, I am asking what contemporary British art (by, for example, Sarah Lucas, Damien Hirst, and Mark Wallinger) has to do with the classical tradition – both the art and literature of Greco-Roman antiquity. I have conducted face-to-face interviews with some of the leading artists working in Britain today, including Lucas, Hirst, Wallinger, Marc Quinn, and Gilbert & George. In addition to contemporary art, the thesis focuses on Greco-Roman art and on myths and modes of looking that have come to shape the western art historical tradition – seeking to offer a different perspective on them from that of the Renaissance and neoclassicism.

The thesis concentrates on the generation of artists known as the YBAs, or Young British Artists, who came to prominence in London in the 1990s. These artists are not renowned for their deference to the classical tradition, and are widely regarded as having turned their backs on classical art and its legacies. The introductory chapter asks whether their work, which has received little scholarly attention, might be productively reassessed from the perspective of classical reception studies. It argues that while their work no longer subscribes to a traditional understanding of classical 'influence', it continues to depend – for its power and provocativeness – on classical concepts of figuration, realism, and the basic nature of art. Without claiming that the work of the YBAs is classical or classicizing, the thesis sets out to challenge the assumption that their work has nothing to do with ancient art, or that it fails to conform to ancient understandings of what art is.

In order to do this, the thesis analyses contemporary works of art through three classical 'lenses', across three chapters. Each lens allows contemporary art to be examined in the context of a longer history: contemporary case studies are analysed against examples of art and text from antiquity, and against later examples of western art which belong squarely to the classical tradition. The first lens is the concept of realism, as seen in artistic and literary explorations of the relationship between art and life. This chapter uses the myth of Pygmalion's statue as a way of thinking about contemporary art's continued engagement with ideas of mimesis and the 'real' which were theorised and debated in antiquity. The second lens is corporeal fragmentation, as evidenced by the broken condition of ancient statues, the popular theme of dismemberment in western art, and the fragmentary body in contemporary art. The final chapter focuses on the figurative plaster cast, arguing that contemporary art continues to invoke and reinvent the long tradition of plaster reproductions of ancient statues and bodies.

Through each of these 'lenses', I argue that contemporary art remains linked, both in form and meaning, to the classical past – often in ways which go beyond the stated intentions of an artist. Contemporary art continues to be informed by ideas and processes that were theorised and practised in the classical world; indeed, it is these ideas and processes that make it deserving of the art label.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. *Tracey Emin, My Bed: contemporary art through the prism of the classical*

Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998; fig. 1) is a sprawling accumulation of stained sheets, liquor bottles, cigarette packets, and other detritus.¹ It began not as an artwork but as an ordinary bed in the artist's flat in Waterloo, and it bears witness to a phase of suicidal depression, casual sex and intoxication. Reframing abject reality as art, *My Bed* is a 'found object' in the mould of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917, an upturned urinal re-presented as a sculptural 'readymade'; fig. 2),² but also an upturning of the age-old formula of the self-portrait, with the subject evoked as an absent presence. Emin has explained how the work began with a moment of epiphany, as she crawled drunkenly from her bedroom into the kitchen and looked back at the bed: "It was disgusting. And then, from one second looking horrible, it suddenly transformed itself into something removed from me, and something beautiful." She was struck, she recalled, by "how classical it looked."³

What can we learn from Emin's 'epiphany'? What does it mean to see her sculpture through the prism of the classical? This thesis addresses the relationship between classical antiquity and art made in Britain in the last three decades – a relationship that is regularly dismissed as vanishingly slight. It offers this reassessment from three angles, or by means of three modalities or 'lenses', all of which can be considered archetypally classical, and at the same time as characteristic of contemporary artistic production – the striving towards representational realism, the fragmented body, and the figurative plaster cast. Placing emphasis on the ways in which artworks act on viewers,⁴ the thesis proposes that contemporary art can be productively analysed and understood in relation to the classical past – specifically the art of ancient Greece and Rome, and the foundations of Art History found in Greek and Latin literature. One possibility, hinted at by Emin herself, is that, in cosmopolitan London at least, art needs to invoke this history in order to qualify as art at all.

¹ On *My Bed*, see Brown, 2006, 100-102; Freedman *et al*, 2006, 251-253; Merck, 2002, 119-133; Cherry, 2002; Wilson, 1999.

² The bibliography on Duchamp is vast. On *Fountain* and the readymades, see especially Schwarz, 2000, 25-51, 199-200; Tomkins, 1997, 181-186, 426-427; Judovitz, 1995, 124-135; Camfield, 1989. On readymades in twentieth-century art, see Buskirk and Nixon, 1999, 205-224; Jones, 1994, 36-40, 41-42, 49-61.

³ She continues: "From a distance, it looked like a painting". Quoted in Gleadell, 2014. Cf. Freedman *et al*, 2006, 251-252. The idea of re-envisioning reality as art is addressed in Chapter 2.

⁴ On the agency of artworks, see Gell, 1998, especially 23-24. See also Section 5, below. For critiques of Gell see Leach, 2007; Bowden 2004.

In this introduction, I address the fundamental question raised by Emin's statement – that of what is meant by 'classical' inflection or (a different term again) 'influence'. For Emin, the experience of seeing her unmade bed as an artwork was synonymous with seeing its classical qualities. But what are classical qualities? Traditionally, when art-historians have seen classical influence in post-antique production, they have seen retellings of classical stories, or quotations of classical bodies, buildings or postures. They have identified the next link in the chain called 'classicism' – a deliberate, retrospective glance to antiquity.⁵ (We need only think of twentieth-century art historians such as Aby Warburg or Erwin Panofsky, whose writings continue to shape understandings of the classical tradition in western art.)⁶ Often, this art-historical way of seeing does little justice to the complex and revolutionary ways in which artists have reinvented or reacted against the classical past,⁷ and arguably relies on as narrow a definition of the 'classical' as of 'influence': it strips the classical of its complexities – its errors, even – seeking instead to map the 'then' to the 'now' by locating the meaning of the new work in the ancient origins of its bodies or buildings, its plots, or postures.⁸ Small wonder that influence should be felt to produce anxiety:⁹ the narrative of artists struggling to equal or surpass the ancients (and driven to despair as well as admiration in the process) has become a commonplace – even a cliché – of Art History.¹⁰

By privileging ways of seeing other than the identification of supposedly shared features that qualify as antique, this thesis creates space for analysing contemporary art in the context of the classical past without needing to imprison it in the pinpointing of iconographic or thematic debts. As well as offering a radical rethink of contemporary art, it hopes to make a

⁵ On classicism in western art since the Renaissance, see *inter alia* Barolsky, 2014a; Kilinski, 2013; Freedman, 2011; Barrow, 2005; Bull, 2005; Cieri Via, 1996; Ginzburg, 1990, especially 77-95; Greenhalgh, 1990; Greenhalgh, 1978; Clark, 1956. On classicism in nineteenth-century art, see especially Barrow, 2007; Liversidge and Edwards, 1996. On classicism in modern British and European art, see Martin, 2016; Green and Daehner, 2011; Silver, 2010; Levin, 2007; Boehm *et al*, 1996; Cowling and Mundy, 1990. On 'classicism' as distinct from the 'classical', see Porter, 2006, 10-19; Settis, 2006, 15-18, 103.

⁶ See n. 30, 35 and 36. On the classical tradition, see Silk *et al*, 2014, especially 3-31; Budelmann and Haubold, 2008.

⁷ One need only think of the exploitation of classicism for ideological ends in the twentieth century: Ades *et al*, 1995, 120-183. Cf. Wyke, 1999.

⁸ Cf. Porter, 2006, 4-6 and 19-20, on the dangers of prescriptive periodization, and 10-19 on the concurrent potency and indefinability of the 'classical'.

⁹ Bloom, 1997, especially 5-16.

¹⁰ As evoked by Henry Fuseli in *The Artist Moved to Despair by the Grandeur of Antique Fragments* (1778-79). See Chapter 3, n. 5. On *paragone*, see Silk *et al*, 2014, 102-110; Preimesberger, 2011, especially 57-61; Ames-Lewis, 2000, 132-134, 269-270. On the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* as a "constant phenomenon of literary history", see Curtius, 1948, 251-255, 251.

contribution to the shifting discipline that is ‘classical reception studies’.¹¹ While the potential scope of such a project is vast, the focus of this study is largely restricted to art made in London in the last thirty years,¹² and primarily the work of those artists who emerged in the 1990s and came to be defined as the Young British Artists (YBAs).¹³ While this thesis will adopt the term as a convenient means of referring to this grouping of artists, the YBAs do not, it should be noted, constitute a ‘movement’ in the conventional sense: their works traverse an eclectic range of media, styles and themes, reflecting and reinventing international trends in modern art.¹⁴

The significance of this moment and milieu as a subject for study lies first in the fact that British art, particularly art in London, felt itself to undergo a revolution – a decisive break from the past – in the years running up to the millennium.¹⁵ Artists emerging from Goldsmiths College in the late 1980s (key among them Emin, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Mark Wallinger) were at the forefront of a brash, buzzing and internationally-acclaimed scene.¹⁶ Secondly, the art that came to define the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in London is frequently marked by a purported hostility – or obliviousness – to art-historical traditions, principally the classical tradition.¹⁷ In certain cases, notably that of Damien Hirst, this generation has equally come to be defined in terms of brazen commerciality.¹⁸ YBA Michael Landy’s description of the National Gallery, while based there for a residency in 2013, might be said to epitomise the indifference of the YBAs towards history in general, and in particular the classical forms and narratives underpinning western art: “I didn’t even know the collection. I didn’t even wander in that often. I had no reference to it until I came to be artist in residence [...] I don’t have any of those [historical] references.”¹⁹

¹¹ On reception and its changing theorisation, see especially Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982; Martindale, 1993; the essays in Martindale and Thomas, 2006; Martindale, 2007; Ziolkowski, 2007; the essays in Kallendorf, 2007, especially chapters 2-8; Hardwick and Stray, 2008; Budelmann and Haubold, 2008; Martindale, 2013; Butler, 2016.

¹² Gilbert & George’s *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, a case study in Chapter 2, was first staged in 1969, but has been reprised repeatedly over the past thirty years.

¹³ Corris, 1992, first uses the term. Cf. Stallabrass, 1999, 2-3.

¹⁴ Shone, 1997, 12; Archer, 1996; Shone, 1995, 8.

¹⁵ On the British focus, see also Section 5.

¹⁶ Fullerton, 2016 7-15, 62-66, 74-77, 139-187; Pooke, 2011, 1-4; Muir, 2009; Collings, 1997; Shone, 1997. On the role of the ‘art world’ in defining art, see Danto, 1964.

¹⁷ Self, 2012; Shone, 1997, 17-19; Roberts, 1996. For a critique of the YBAs’ abandonment of tradition, see Massow, 2002.

¹⁸ Stallabrass, 1999, 188-195.

¹⁹ Interview with James Cahill, 8 April 2013. On “western” as an historical construct, see Hall, 1992, 276-278; Settis, 2006, 91-99.

The stance of YBAs – which, as we shall see, has often been more of a pose than a deep-seated principle – appears to repeat the disavowal of ancient art and representational ideals found in Modernist rhetoric,²⁰ and carries echoes of the more violent attacks on the classical tradition (including the literal smashing of plaster cast collections) which had occurred in art schools since the 1960s, a subject to which I will return to in Chapter 4.²¹ So extreme is their claimed disavowal that they are often excluded from the history of art: in the twenty-five years since the YBA phenomenon took hold, there has been no substantial art-historical study of the British art of the last three decades.²² Julian Stallabrass's *High Art Lite* (1999), the one extensive academic study, offers more by way of political critique than historical context. It takes a largely negative view of the YBAs' perceived embrace of the mass media and deflection of critical analysis.²³ Other books have taken the form of memoirs and anecdotal histories.²⁴

This thesis aims to give contemporary British art a place in (art) history, by looking at art made in London in the last thirty years from a different perspective – that of classical reception studies, as detailed below in Section 5. It argues that the evocation of the classical tradition need not be as literal as in the art of previous centuries; that for contemporary art to find a place in western Art History, it has to resonate with Greco-Roman art and literature, and that, whatever its form and content, its art status is bound by ideas about the nature and function of art that have spiralled out of classical antiquity across the Renaissance and Enlightenment into the modern period.

This spiralling means that British art of the 1990s and the decades either side cannot be viewed in isolation from the art and the progressively globalised 'art worlds' of previous centuries. To focus on a thirty-year period is inevitably to impose an artificial demarcation.

²⁰ Contemporary art and its 'postmodern' moment may be viewed as Modernism's teleological successor. Cf. Galinsky, 1992, 2: "For good reasons, we are talking about *post*-modernism and not *anti*-modernism." On Modernism's supposed rejection of the classical, see Pettejohn, 2012, 1-6, 31, 171-256; Grafton *et al*, 2010, 17; Krauss, 1986, 157. Histories of twentieth-century art typically affirm the decline of the classical artistic tradition. E.g. Canaday, 1959, and Arnason, 1977, link modern art's rise with the decline of the French Academy. Cf. Greenberg, 1961a, 27: the redundancy of "inherited forms" accounts for "the present decline of high culture".

²¹ See Chapter 4, n. 113. On the actual diversity of classical reference in contemporary art, see n.164.

²² See however de Bolla, 2001, on Marc Quinn: *ibid*, 1, 21, 141-144.

²³ Stallabrass, 1999, especially 1-13, 286-308.

²⁴ Fullerton, 2016; Muir, 2009; Collings, 1997.

Critics and art historians have noted the links between YBA art and international movements such as Minimalism, Conceptualism and Pop Art; but far less has been said about its longer historical reach.²⁵ This thesis proposes to show that contemporary British art has a history which goes far beyond that of Modernism.²⁶ (In the sections that follow, I will consider the way in which classicism and Modernism have been constructed in over-simplistic opposition to one another, as signifying continuity on the one hand and rupture on the other – an opposition that takes no account of the repeated ruptures that have marked the history of classicism).²⁷ The thesis will refer throughout to wider international and historical examples of art that have nurtured classical themes or ideas – adopting what Fernand Braudel seminally theorised as a *longue durée* point of view – in an attempt to redefine what ‘classical’ means visually as we look to the future as art historians and classicists.²⁸

2. *Classical influence in recent Art History*

This thesis aims to examine the relationship between art and classical antiquity in a way that moves beyond the traditional procedures and assumptions of Art History. Its central contention is that after the decline of the academic and illustrational mode of classicism that prevailed from the Renaissance until the mid-nineteenth century, the topic of classical reception in art is not redundant, but demands a different approach.

A different approach from what? How has classical influence tended to be perceived in the past, and how has the answer to this shaped the way we think about art’s relationship with classical antiquity even now? I open with two prominent art historians from the last hundred years, to demonstrate how influence has been described and progressively enshrined in the discipline, before looking at recent studies of classical reception in modern art which correspond with their approach. The intention here is not to trace the long historiography of the classical tradition in art. Nor is it to disregard the broad variety of ways in which classical forms and themes have been deployed, from direct copying through to creative adaptation: the paintings and sculptures examined throughout the thesis indeed reflect the range of

²⁵ See n. 14.

²⁶ Artistic periodisation is usually attributed to Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt in the later nineteenth century. See Silk *et al.*, 2014, 15; and on the uses and abuses of periodisation, *ibid.*, 15-31; Panofsky, 1960, 2-4.

²⁷ See e.g. Porter, 2006, 48-49.

²⁸ Braudel, 1949, sought to analyse history under a range of ‘magnifications’ or *durées* (the *longue durée* being on the scale of centuries). Cf. Braudel, 1958.

modulations of classicism since the Renaissance.²⁹ Rather, through prominent and comparatively recent examples of Art History, this section highlights the fundamental ways in which art's deployment of the classical continues to be understood – namely, in terms of influence – however direct or oblique that deployment may be. The Introduction then proceeds to re-examine two works of the kind that give these art historians their standard material, to reveal that even in the Renaissance, 'classical influence' was neither obvious nor easily definable.

Discussions of classical influence in post-classical art are prolific throughout Art History, perhaps above all in relation to the Renaissance, when the emulation and adaptation of classical art came to be seen as fundamental to art's meaning and function.³⁰ As Giorgio Vasari propounded in his *Lives of the Artists* (first published in 1550 and enlarged in 1558; one of the earliest biography-focused histories of art, structured according to an idea of progressive refinement of style), innovation in art necessitated an act of looking back in veneration to the lost classical past.³¹ What distinguished the early masters of the Renaissance from their medieval forbears, according to Vasari, was an ability to embrace both the surviving material culture and the naturalistic style of the ancients: "the geniuses who came afterward [*viz.*, after Cimabue] were well able to distinguish the good from the bad and abandoning the old style, reverted to the imitation of classical art with all their skill and wit."³²

This art-historical theorisation of what Francesco Petrarch hailed, in the fourteenth century, a "revival under the influence of classical models" has had a significant impact on how we think about the reception of antiquity in art.³³ Petrarch conceived of a sharp divide – as

²⁹ Compare the spectrum of western responses to classical texts, concepts or words – ranging from direct employment to unconscious instantiation. See Silk *et al.*, 2014, 4-7, 251-252, 135-136.

³⁰ See n. 5. The leading historian of Renaissance borrowings from classical sculpture was Aby Warburg, of whom Panofsky was a follower. See especially Warburg, 1999c; and 1999d, 271-273, on the emergence of 'emotive formula'. Cf. Brilliant, 2000b, 272-274.

³¹ On ancient Greek art's progression towards representational perfection, and the analogous development of early Renaissance art, see Vasari, 1987a, 'Preface to Part Two', 85-93. On the use of classical architectural and sculptural models, see *ibid.*, 112, 139, and 'Preface to Part 3', 249-251; on Donatello and Brunelleschi's fascination with the antique, 140-142; on Donatello's proximity to the ancients, 174; on the influence of ancient masterpieces mentioned by Pliny and excavated in the Renaissance, 251; on Raphael's rivalling Apelles and Zeuxis, 252; on Michelangelo's triumph over ancient artists, whose own "superiority is beyond doubt", 253-254, 343; on the primitive style of Bellini and others, resulting from their not being able to copy antiquities, 443. Cf. Goldstein, 1996, 137-139. See also Chapter 2, n. 1.

³² Vasari, 1896, 242. Quoted and trans. Panofsky, 1960, 31. Cf. Vasari, 1987a, 45-46.

³³ Petrarch, *Africa*, IX, line 453 ff. Quoted in Panofsky, 1960, 10.

opposed to a continuous development – between the *historiae antiquae* and the latter *historiae novae*; and this distinction accounts for the double-edged spirit of reverential nostalgia and imaginative reclamation with which artists and writers of the Renaissance came to view the ancient past – a spirit that is reflected, in particular, in the vernacular translations of classical texts and mythographic anthologies that grew in popularity throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁴ ‘Classical models’ thereby take on a twofold status, dually active and passive: they are entities that infiltrate and inform later art, and at the same time they are malleable visual formulae that can be adopted and adapted. Either way, and most significantly, they are, for many art historians, ‘known quantities’ whose movements or mutations are possible to trace.

In *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (1960), Erwin Panofsky – one of the twentieth century’s most significant theorists and historians of western art – proposed that the Renaissance was distinguished by a new awareness of the classical past as a discrete phenomenon, remote from the present both in time and temperament.³⁵ This view was to have a lasting impact on Art History (not least on Panofsky himself) in terms of the discipline’s tendency to conceptualise classical influence in clear-cut terms, as a set of visible allusions (that is, intentional nods) to – or adaptations of – known models: “In the Italian Renaissance the classical past began to be looked upon from a fixed distance, quite comparable to the ‘distance between the eye and the object’ in that most characteristic invention of this very Renaissance, focused perspective.”³⁶ Central to Panofsky’s conception of the Renaissance – and by extension, to the conception of classical influence that endures to this day – is the way in which the classical, seen from afar, had resolved into a “coherent cultural system within which all things belonged together”.³⁷ The classical was visibly, definably ‘other’: “The classical past was looked upon, for the first time, *as a totality* cut off from the present; and, therefore, as an ideal to be longed for instead of a reality to be both utilized and feared [...]

³⁴ Bull, 2005, 16-22. On Renaissance translations and receptions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, see also Burrow, 2002; Barkan, 1986, 175-206, 329-339. On the influence of Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, see Barkan, 1999, 89-105.

³⁵ Panofsky, 1960. On the defining character of the Renaissance, *ibid*, 1-41, and on medieval versus Renaissance conceptions of the classical: *ibid*, 82-113.

³⁶ Panofsky, 1960, 108. Panofsky characterises the Middle Ages, by contrast, as culturally syncretic and temporally synchronic: *ibid*, 110-111. Cf. Warburg, 1999e, 559.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 111. Cf. Panofsky on Dürer’s ‘discovery’ of classical art after northern Europe’s long estrangement: “Italian art could find its way back to the Antique by way of affinity, as it were; the North could recapture it – if at all – only by way of antithesis.” Panofsky, 1955b, 236.

The Renaissance stood weeping at [antiquity's] grave and tried to resurrect its soul."³⁸ Panofsky's metaphor of a grave is highly revealing. Lapidary and commemorative, it suggests an impulse to fix, memorialise, and reanimate the classical past as though a distinct body.

This somewhat paradoxical idea of the classical past as a discrete yet elusive phenomenon – present in ancient artworks and texts, and present also in 'spirit' – has remained central to Art History.³⁹ It is reflected in the precision with which Panofsky and many others have charted appearances of classical forms and themes.⁴⁰ For example, in his final work *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic* (1969), Panofsky enumerates just some of the classical borrowings that abounded in the 'second phase' of the artist's career – from the 'patterning' of Christ in the lineaments of the *Laocoön* (fig. 3), to the portrayal of a story from Philostratus, to the use of images from classical sarcophagi.⁴¹ There is a concomitant tendency to summon or extol 'the classical' in more sweeping terms, as evidenced by the following assertion from Panofsky's earlier essay 'Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity': "it was Dürer who imparted to northern art a feeling for classical beauty and classical pathos, classical force and classical clarity".⁴² We thus find the Renaissance way of seeing the classical, in terms of its otherness and singularity, channelled into Panofsky's own twentieth-century art-historical perspective. That way of seeing is manifested both in the identification of classical references and in grander statements about the classical – insufficiently interrogated – as a universal presence.

It is possible to trace an analogous point of view in more recent studies of classical receptions in post-classical art.⁴³ One of the most celebrated examples is Malcolm Bull's *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art* (2005). At the close of this long analysis,

³⁸ Panofsky, 1960, 113. Italics mine. See also Panofsky, 1955a, 4. On the importance of the temporal 'frame of reference' for understanding a work of art: *ibid.*, 7. Cf. Warburg's prevailing question, *Was bedeutet das Nacheleben der Antike?*: Brilliant, 2000b, 272.

³⁹ This dual conception of the classical – as precise and pervasive – was enshrined by Johann Joachim Winckelmann. His *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* ('History of the Art of Antiquity') of 1764 sought to classify statues according to chronological schema, while also evoking their immanent spirit. Chapter 2 examines his ecphrasis on the *Apollo Belvedere* (Winckelmann, 2006, 333-334); and Chapter 3 his ecphrasis on the *Belvedere Torso* (Winckelmann, 2013, 143-147). On Winckelmann see Potts, 2006; Prettejohn, 2012, 1-29; Brilliant, 2000b; Potts, 1994; Howard, 1990, 162-174

⁴⁰ Cf. Gombrich, 1963.

⁴¹ Panofsky 1969, 20.

⁴² Panofsky, 1955b, 281.

⁴³ See e.g. Levin, 2007, who pits the broad concept of "classical reverberation" – the reception of classical metaphors into modern art and discourse via Freud – against specific instances of formal and thematic allusion.

structured in the style of an anthology according to the appearances of pagan deities in Renaissance decorative and high arts, Bull asserts the seductive otherness of the classical world for Renaissance artists and audiences: “the lives of the saints are much closer to those of the Renaissance viewer [...] Mythological scenes are often set in nature – a world without architecture where few people work and no one pays taxes”.⁴⁴ Bull argues, moreover, that mythological art generally lacks the acute perspectival and chromatic naturalism of religious art: it is different not simply in terms of its subject matter, but its ordering of the visible universe. The contrast Bull draws is a precise and political one: the quixotic *locus amoenus* of mythological (principally Ovidian) narrative stands, he argues, in strict opposition with the civic and economic realities of the “Renaissance viewer”. But his underlying point is akin to Panofsky’s: the classical was remote from the contemporary, and able to be summoned in spirit as a foil for the contemporary. And this act of summoning, as the thematic divisions of Bull’s book clearly imply, took the form of ‘borrowings’ – identifiable references to characters, stories, or iconographic formulae.

It should be pointed out that both Panofsky and Bull give extensive consideration to the ways in which classical models were distorted and domesticated in medieval and Renaissance art. Panofsky repeatedly explores the role of “intermediary transformations” such as later artworks, post-antique texts and medievalizing illustrations of ancient myths, emphasising (for example) Dürer’s reliance on classicizing works of the early Italian Renaissance.⁴⁵ Bull similarly emphasises the gradual *assimilation* of classical models into new artworks. He argues that the commonplace assumption (stemming from Vasari) that Renaissance art heralded a ‘return to antiquity’ is oversimplistic. “By the time of Raphael’s death in 1520”, he points out, “the revival of the pagan gods had only just begun” – and significantly, this “lack of synchronization between the artistic Renaissance and the return of the gods points to another disjunction – that between classical style and classical subjects.”⁴⁶ An ancient story might be recounted in a style that had little or nothing to do with those of ancient Greece or Rome. We would be wrong, therefore, to regard classicism as a straightforward matter of the

⁴⁴ Bull, 2005, 381. For a critique of Bull, see Clark, 2005, who notes that the former’s “argument” is located in such “asides” as this one.

⁴⁵ Panofsky, 1955c, 44. See *ibid.*, 44-54; Panofsky, 1955b, 237-238.

⁴⁶ Bull, 384. Panofsky terms this mismatch between classical style and subject matter the “principle of disjunction”: Panofsky, 1960, 84-90.

transportation of ancient models into later art, little different from the reconstruction of those models in restorations, copies and sketches.⁴⁷

But both Panofsky and Bull, in making these concessions, nonetheless maintain an exacting distinction between the classical (as an understood, finite entity) and its derivatives or corruptions. Just as ‘style’ and ‘subject’ are treated in the above quotation from Bull as distinct entities, the classical and the post-classical are distilled into clearly demarcated categories. For example, while arguing that Dürer borrowed a pose from one of the rampaging Romans in Pollaiuolo’s lost drawing of the *Rape of the Sabine Women*, rather than an ancient source, Panofsky’s mode of analysis continues to hinge around the ‘finding’ of the classical pose at the root of successive Renaissance translations. He observes that the “Pollaiuolo figure is based upon a type extremely popular in classical sculpture [...] a *Hercules carrying the Erymanthean Boar* well known to us from many classical reliefs and statues. It is through Pollaiuolo’s translation, and not by direct contact with a Roman original [...] that Dürer became acquainted with this classical type.”⁴⁸ The implication is that Renaissance images may always be stripped back to reveal an original ancient text, type, or model – that classical resonance may be dissected into a set of classical references. In literary terms, this might be described as a tendency to seek out ‘allusion’ within the expansive domain of ‘intertextuality’.⁴⁹ In the sections which follow, I will argue that the terminology of classical literary receptions may be productively applied to Art History, offering a means of articulating the different modulations of classicism in art.

The above examples show the persistence of the archetypally Renaissance conception of the classical as something that can be named and circumscribed, its influence charted through concrete examples. This conception has continued to inform studies of classical receptions in modern art. The exhibition ‘Modern Antiquity: Picasso, de Chirico, Léger, and Picabia in the Presence of the Antique’, at the Getty Villa, Los Angeles, in 2011, concentrated on the self-conscious classicism of painters in the early twentieth century – evinced in sculptural poses

⁴⁷ As surveyed by Bober and Rubinstein, 1986.

⁴⁸ Panofsky, 1955b, 245-246.

⁴⁹ ‘Allusion’ is used throughout this thesis to signify an intentional (as opposed to subliminal or chance) reference. Julia Kristeva conceives of intertextuality as a universal condition of literature: “every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts.” Kristeva, 1969, 146. Quoted in Silk *et al*, 2014, 135. Cf. Gell, 1998, 237, on artistic *oeuvre*: “each separate work is a modification, a recension, of previous ones”. On intertextuality, see also Culler, 1976. On ‘allusion’ versus ‘intertext’, see Hinds, 1998, especially xi-xii; on allusion as recognition, *ibid*, 5-10; and on ‘allusion’ as a process which itself may entail “indirection as much as direction”, *ibid*, 25. On intentionality, cf. Katz, 2016, 113-114.

and mythological characters and settings.⁵⁰ We find a comparable view of antique ‘presences’ in art historian Rosemary Barrow’s essay ‘From Praxiteles to De Chirico: Art and Reception’ (2005).⁵¹ This traces the transmission of the *Venus pudica* pose from antiquity via the Renaissance to the Modernist paintings of Giorgio de Chirico. “From the Renaissance onwards,” Barrow argues, “artists continue to operate within a broadly comparable structure of *visual certainties*, and, from Botticelli to Matisse, painters draw on the viewer’s familiarity with the female nude in the tradition of the Cnidian Aphrodite.”⁵² Significantly, she also implies that the method of ‘spotting’ classical references might give rise to a broader enquiry into classical modalities – thus anticipating the methodology of this thesis.⁵³ So, for example, the fragmentary plaster torso in Giorgio de Chirico’s painting *The Uncertainty of the Poet* (1913; fig. 4), while deriving from “a more or less specific ancient source”, is equally interesting (if not more so) for the fact that it signifies doubly “the place of the ancient in the modern” and “a fragmented modern identity.”⁵⁴ Chapters 3 and 4 will return to the idea that fragmentation and the plaster cast alike are emblematic of ancient and modern art.

We have seen how the idea of the antique as a foil for the present – remote in time and yet recoverable in spirit, if not in the excavation and importation of antiquity’s physical remains – has continued to inform art and Art History for centuries since the ‘rediscovery’ of antique statuary in the fifteenth century (a process of physical unearthing and aesthetic reappraisal).⁵⁵ Classical perspectives on modern and contemporary art are still largely informed by the idea of classical influence as fixable and finite.⁵⁶ By the conclusion of this thesis, it will be clear that the impulse to ‘see’ classical forms and themes in works of art is not redundant: it constitutes a powerful, revealing, and unavoidable way of looking at art. But the attendant idea of *influence* – defined in terms of “visual certainties”, or self-conscious and deliberate acts of emulation and adaptation – is no longer adequate when we seek to rationalise art’s relationships with the classical. In the section that follows, I will consider how this

⁵⁰ ‘Modern Antiquity: Picasso, de Chirico, Léger, Picabia’, 2 November 2011 to 16 January 2012, Getty Villa, Los Angeles, 2011. See Green and Daehner, 2011.

⁵¹ Cf. the chapters by Barrow in Silk *et al*, 2014.

⁵² Barrow, 2005, 359. Italics mine. Cf. *ibid*, 262, on the end of this “Greco-Roman artistic continuum”. Cf. Havelock, 1995, on the *Aphrodite of Cnidus*; and Rubin, 2000, on allegorical images of Venus and Eve.

⁵³ For more recent precursors to this thesis, see Sections 5.2 and 5.4, below.

⁵⁴ Barrow, 2005, 248.

⁵⁵ On “antiquity” and “modernity” as mutually reinforcing, see Prettejohn, 2-3. On the unearthing of classical statues in the Renaissance, see Barkan, 1999, 1-63. On the charting of classical ruins and topography, see Weiss, 1969, 105-144.

⁵⁶ See however Holmes and Marta, 2017, discussed below.

codification of classical influence chokes our understanding of what even Renaissance works were doing.

3. *Classicism in art: two Renaissance examples*

What then are the established hallmarks of classicism in art, the archetypal manifestations of classical influence that defined Renaissance art, and are usually thought to have been rejected over the past century? One work that arguably provides an answer is Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (fig. 5), painted for Philip II of Spain in 1556-9.⁵⁷ In theme and composition, it is an unambiguously classicizing work that will, for many observers, throw into relief the differences between art immersed in the classical tradition and art that ignores or rejects that tradition.⁵⁸ One of a series of scenes based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the painting is among the most famous in a litany of Renaissance and Baroque paintings after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which had become known by Titian's era as the Painters' Bible.⁵⁹ His canvas depicts Diana and her nymphs reclining in a woodland grotto at the moment when the hunter Actaeon stumbles upon them. Invoking the popular Renaissance dictum (after Horace) of *ut pictura poesis*, it translates the key dramatic elements of Ovid's story into a synoptic visual scheme.⁶⁰ And so in Actaeon's faltering pose we perceive his guilelessness and innocence – his raised arm conveys both apology and salutation. Diana's rage is expressed in a devastating glare. The pair of antlers on the column in the background meanwhile offer a prefiguration of Actaeon's fate: he will be turned into a stag and dismembered by his hounds.

⁵⁷ Titian's mythological *poesie* comprised subjects drawn from the *Metamorphoses*: *Danaë receiving the Golden Rain*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *Diana and Actaeon*, *Diana and Callisto*, and *The Rape of Europa* (the unfinished *The Death of Actaeon* was intended as a sequel). The first two stayed in Spain; the others passed by different routes into the collection of Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (auctioned in London in 1798). On Titian's *poesie*, see Barkan, 1987, 190-202, 337-338, n. 77; Rosand, 1972; Wethey, 1975, 71-84.

⁵⁸ The classic iconographic analysis of Titian's mythological paintings is Panofsky, 1969, 140-171. On Dürer's debt to the *Apollo Belvedere*, cf. Panofsky, 1955b, 251-253. On the Ovidian elements of *Diana and Actaeon*, see Panofsky, 1969, 154-158; Barkan, 1986, 200-201; Martindale, 1993, 61-64; Sharrock, 1996, 111-112. For a critique of traditional analyses of Titian's "fidelity or infidelity" to classical sources, see Rosand, 1972, 536.

⁵⁹ On Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in western art, see *inter alia* Barolsky, 2014a; Allen, 2002; Barolsky, 1998; Barkan, 1986, especially 175-206. On Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the Painter's Bible, see Bull, 2005, 36; Barkan, 1986, 187; Panofsky, 1969, 140.

⁶⁰ Horace, *Ars poetica*, 361. Horace employs the term to argue that paintings and poems profit from different forms of scrutiny. It became a hallowed principle of Renaissance theory, appearing until the close of the Enlightenment, usually accompanied by the antithesis *poesia tacens, pictura loquens*, attributed by Plutarch to Simonides of Chios (*De gloria Atheniensium*, 3.347a). On *ut pictura poesis*, see Braider, 1999; and in relation to Titian's *poesie*, Rosand, 1972. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argued against the term in his *Laocoön* (1766), asserting the two forms' distinct natures – and poetry's superiority: *ibid*, 1766 (1962), *passim*.

Classical allusion is also evident aesthetically, throughout the painting's smaller elements. Architecturally, Titian invokes the classical past through the pillar and vaulted arch of Diana's grotto, an improbably man-made embodiment of Ovid's assertion that "nature had simulated art" by drawing a "natural arch" (160 *nativum duxerat arcum*).⁶¹ The stone fountain with its circular base, which has been carved with a fearsome head (a lion or possibly the Gorgon) calls to mind the architecture of classical and neoclassical Italy.⁶² The figures, too, are reminiscent of antique sculpture.⁶³ Actaeon rests his weight on his front foot as if faltering mid-stride, adopting a *contrapposto* stance akin to that of the most prized sculptures of antiquity.⁶⁴ Combined with his outstretched arm, this attitude specifically recalls the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 6).⁶⁵ The crouching nymph at the centre of the picture evokes another famous statue type – the poised, self-protective figure of the *Crouching Venus* (fig. 7).⁶⁶ Again, the nymph reclining on the left-hand side of the picture might be a naturalistic recasting of the Belvedere Courtyard's 'Cleopatra' / *Ariadne* (fig. 8).⁶⁷ The iconography of Titian's figures thus channels and compresses a range of classical attitudes.

Titian's painting draws together the standard forms of antique reference outlined above – bodies reminiscent of ancient sculpture, fragments of Greco-Roman architecture, and mythological narrative. His painting declares its classical subject in its very title, of course, yet artworks are also capable of such allusions without announcing a mythological theme, as the near-contemporaneous example of Michelangelo's *Crouching Boy* (1530-34; fig. 9) demonstrates.⁶⁸ In iconographic terms, the boy's pose is evocative of at least two ancient paradigms – the *Crouching Venus* and the Hellenistic *Spinario* (depicting a boy extracting a thorn from his foot; fig. 10).⁶⁹ As in Titian's case, the medium and naturalistic style of figuration are also unavoidably classical – and probably with no small degree of self-

⁶¹ Rosand, 1972, 535-536; Panofsky, 1969, 157-158. Panofsky's interpretation of the arch as Gothic (i.e. art following nature) is disputed by Wetthey, who perceives an Italianate Renaissance structure: *ibid*, 1975, 73, n. 359.

⁶² E.g. the Garden of Bomarzo with its stone monsters.

⁶³ On classical bodies in the painting, see Kilinski, 2013, 205 (who regards Titian's seated nymph as a reference to the *Crouching Aphrodite*); Holo, 1978-1979, 35-36. On the figure of the *Crouching Venus* in the painting, see Gould, 1972. On the classical nude as an alibi for eroticism, see Hope, 1976.

⁶⁴ Squire, 2011, 3-5.

⁶⁵ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 8, 148-151.

⁶⁶ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 86, 321-323.

⁶⁷ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 24, 184-187. By the time Titian was painting the *poesie*, this sculpture had become a fountain in the Belvedere Courtyard.

⁶⁸ The *Crouching Boy* was intended for the decoration of the Medici Chapel in the New Sacristy, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence: de Tolnay, 1948, 152-153. A contemporary parallel is Ron Mueck's sculpture *Boy* (1999).

⁶⁹ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 78, 308-309. On the *Spinario*'s manifestations in Renaissance art, see Barkan, 148-153.

consciousness on Michelangelo's part: more than any other artist, he came to stand for the *paragone* or rivalry between ancient and modern traditions through his dual restoration and imitation of ancient sculptures.⁷⁰ Michelangelo's veneration for the antique is legendary: it is said that he was attendant at the unearthing of the *Laocoön*, the most important intact ancient sculpture yet discovered, in 1506 – an anecdote that dramatises his perceived instrumentality in reviving the classical past.⁷¹ As a youth, he had trained in the sculpture garden of Lorenzo de Medici, one of the most impressive collections of antique statues of its day, an experience that is documented by Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi in their biographies (first published in 1550 and 1553 respectively).⁷² Significantly, Vasari presents Lorenzo's collection as being both a source of academic instruction and a creative stimulus – at once pedagogical and aesthetically inspiring – when he records that it “was full of antiques and richly furnished with excellent pictures *collected for their beauty, and for study and pleasure*.”⁷³ Condivi records: “when Michelangelo saw these things and felt their beauty, [...] judging the Medicean gardens to be the best school, [he] spent all his time and faculties in working there.”⁷⁴

Even the briefest analysis underlines why it is that the works of Titian and Michelangelo – foremost among the Old Masters of the Renaissance in Europe – are acknowledged epitomes of classicism, of the reawakening of the classical past in literature and art. It also clarifies the kind of literal classicism that reverberates, albeit in different forms, and with varying intensity, for four centuries afterwards, becoming enshrined in the theorisation and teaching of art. In this respect, their works might be regarded as embodiments of the kind of classical influence that has all but disappeared by the time we arrive at contemporary art in Britain.

But how unambiguously classical are these artists? Leaving aside the obvious classical references cited above, there are numerous ways in which Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* and Michelangelo's *Crouching Boy* intersect more obliquely and incidentally with classical models than first appears; ways, even, in which both are non-classical works of art, in the traditional sense, or even threaten to debunk the category of the classical. As will be seen, the

⁷⁰ See n. 10 and n. 79. On Michelangelo's engagement with antiquity, see especially Howard, 2003; Barkan, 1999, 3, 13-16, 197-207; Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, 463; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 372.

⁷¹ Michelangelo's presence at the excavation was recorded by Francesco da Sangallo; Barkan, 1999, 3. On Michelangelo's adaptations of the *Laocoön*, see *ibid*, 13-16.

⁷² On Vasari and Condivi's mutual influence, see Barolsky, 1994, xiii-xiv; Pon, 1996.

⁷³ Vasari, 1987a, 332. Italics mine.

⁷⁴ Condivi, 1823, 7. Quoted in Symonds, 1911, 20.

viewer plays a key role in identifying this more oblique mode of classicism. Once again, the literary concept of intertextuality – with its implication of reciprocity between texts – may offer a more productive means of understanding these works’ relationships with classical antiquity (relationships which range in directness and intentionality), than the traditional art-historical procedure of locating classical influences within a work of art.⁷⁵

Looking at *Diana and Actaeon*, we can, at best, only observe that the nymph reclining on the left-hand side *might* be a recasting of the ‘*Cleopatra*’ / *Ariadne*, in the absence of any explicit statement of intention from Titian (it is less explicit, certainly, than in Titian’s earlier *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, 1523-1526, in the Prado; fig. 11). The Vatican statue is only the most famous example of a broad category of reclining nymphs and heroines, spanning antiquity and the Renaissance: Titian’s nymph need not be a quotation of any particular model.⁷⁶ Even if the ancient statue were a conscious point of reference, the model has been refracted almost beyond recognition: translated into a semi-naturalistic scheme, there is no way of confirming or denying the reference.⁷⁷ Unless the nymph is to be understood as nothing more than a citation of the ancient statue, we must give consideration to all the ways in which she is different from it, and transcends its influence.⁷⁸

For one thing, she is virtually naked: the elaborate drapery of the ancient marble has been reduced to a loose blue girdle that falls away to reveal the woman’s body, as opposed to enveloping and concealing her. Secondly, she has awoken from sleep, and the classical statue’s famous right arm – originally a self-enclosing pose of oblivious stirring – is now deployed extrovertly and productively to signal the intruder.⁷⁹ Lifting the red curtain as Actaeon stumbles past it, Titian’s nymph performs the function of ‘discovering’ him and

⁷⁵ Cf. Howard, for whom the *Crouching Boy* “is vaguely akin to the Hellenistic Spinario.” Ibid, 2003, 52. See n. 43, above.

⁷⁶ Cf. Warburg’s conversion of specific artworks into types through the concept of *pathosformel* (“pathos formula”): Brilliant, 2000b, 272-273. See Chapter 3, n. 132. On reclining female figures, or ‘sleeping nymphs’, see Wren Christian, 2010, 134-142, 178-182; Barkan, 1999, 233-248.

⁷⁷ Cf. Barrow, 2005, 357.

⁷⁸ Arguably, citation is impossible in visual contexts – to be seen more accurately as ‘derivation’ or ‘evocation’: Liverani, 2011, 41-44. On quotation as characterised by literalness and discreteness, see Morawski, 1970; and on the applicability of the concept to art, *ibid*, 702.

⁷⁹ Titian’s translation of a sculptural motif into a painting may be seen as playing out the Renaissance *paragone* between painting and sculpture (other such pairings included the visual arts and literature, *disegno* and *colorito*, sight and touch or sight and hearing, and the ancients and the moderns): Barkan, 1999, 16-17; Rosand, 1972, 535. On the rivalry between painting and sculpture – codified by Leonardo da Vinci in the 1490s – in sixteenth-century Italy, see Pardo, 1993, 60-65. Chapter 3 addresses the convergence, in Renaissance painting, of sculptural and animate bodies.

turning to Diana in anticipation – leading us, spatially, from his blunder to Diana’s reaction. In this way, she enjoys agency over and above her capacity to allude to a classical model. While her posture can be understood in relation to the ‘*Cleopatra*’ / *Ariadne* – indeed, her languor and elegance owe something to her congruence with that model – she diverges from the classical statue as much as she conforms to it. And it is precisely through that divergence that she achieves a pivotal dramatic role.

Then there are the interpolations that have little or nothing to do with classical iconography or mythological narrative – Diana’s lapdog that barks furiously at Actaeon (as though roused from the coverlet of Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, 1538),⁸⁰ or the black slave who rushes to screen Diana, described in passing by Panofsky as “the negro girl somewhat incongruously attending Diana”.⁸¹ She bears witness not to the classical past but to the increased visibility of black servants in Renaissance Venice.⁸² These modern additions transport us, if anything, into the realm of an Italian brothel; they offset and subvert the classical sculptural overtones of the picture, subtly casting the ancient goddess as a modern-day courtesan.⁸³ But in this regard, they invoke a dualistic view – of divine subject and meretricious model – which existed in antiquity: the late Classical sculptor Praxiteles famously employed the courtesan Phryne as his model for the *Aphrodite of Cnidus* and other statues.⁸⁴ The ‘unclassical’ setting of Titian’s picture thus elicits a classically-rooted conflation of sanctity and eroticism, in relation to the sculpted female nude, which will be explored more fully in Chapter 2. Again, Titian’s landscape and architecture are as evocative of Renaissance Italy as of the ancient world. The fact that the arch and pillar are fragmentary might indeed be read as an indication that the classical era has already passed, its monuments fallen into ruins. The antlers which lurk proleptically in the midst of the scene, foretelling Actaeon’s metamorphosis, function as a more universal symbol of belatedness: they resemble a spoliated architectural fragment, particularly the *bucrania* or Roman sacrificial reliefs that remained prominent as architectural decorations during the Renaissance.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ The *Venus of Urbino* was first identified as a *Venus* in Vasari’s 1568 edition: Vasari, 1987a, 453. On this painting’s slippage between antiquity and modernity, see Barrow, 2005, 355; Pardo 1993, 59-60. On the *Venus pudica* pose in Titian, see Goffen, 1997, especially 73-78.

⁸¹ Panofsky, 1969. 157.

⁸² Kaplan, 2010, 130-131, 126-142.

⁸³ On courtesans in Titian, see Goffen, 1997, 82; Rosand, 1997, 47-48.

⁸⁴ Pliny, *HN*, 34.69-70; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 13.590, 591A, 591B; Pausanias, *Periegesis Hellados*, 1.20.1-2, 9.27.3-5. See Morales, 2011; Barrow, 2005, 362; Hales, 2002, 256; Ajootian, 1996, 97-113; Pollitt, 1990, 86-88. See also Chapter 2, n. 74.

⁸⁵ On *spolia* in the Renaissance see Koortbojian, 2011.

These elements of Titian's painting, in which classical reference is enmeshed with non-classical or post-classical imagery, help to demonstrate the limitations of the traditional method of distilling classical influence into known quantities or proverbial 'tokens of recognition', and of measuring the classicism of the picture against those tokens.⁸⁶ Such an approach both channels attention away from the picture's contemporariness (rendering it little more than 'modern dress') and hypostasizes the classical. We stop noticing the ways in which the artwork is autonomous – distinct from its putative models – fixating overly on its capacity to invoke or merely resemble something from the ancient past. We are at risk, ultimately, of overlooking the basic facts that Titian's mode of story-telling is entirely unlike Ovid's (that is, pictorial rather than poetic), and that this difference was deliberate and pointed, intended to demonstrate painting's unique merits within the *paragone* between painting and poetry.⁸⁷ We might similarly ignore the fact that Titian's painted bodies are ontologically distinct from ancient sculptures.⁸⁸ At the same time, ancient sources are reified into 'cardboard cutouts' with fixed and universal meanings, inscribed in antiquity, that merely need to be 'uncovered' within the later artwork as tokens of 'classical influence'. Ultimately, such an approach denies the possibility of interpretation (both Titian's and the present-day viewer's) inflecting or engendering meaning in the present.

The works of Titian and Michelangelo help to show how classical influence in art occupies a spectrum. This ranges from copying (or what might be seen as the artistic equivalent of Renaissance 'Ciceronianism' – slavish imitation of classical archetypes),⁸⁹ to creative adaptation of classical forms and themes (what might more properly termed *classicism*), through to a looser mode of affinity in which authorial intention is impossible to ascertain, and for which 'influence' ceases to be a productive term. (This Introduction might equally have employed post-Renaissance examples to demonstrate the same spectrum, such as eighteenth-century marble copies of classical statues versus neoclassical sculptures from the

⁸⁶ See Goldhill and Osborne, 1994, on the problems attending "identification" of scenes and figures in ancient art. Cf. Barkan, 1999, *passim*.

⁸⁷ See n. 10 and n. 79. On the painting-poetry *paragone* in Titian, see Rosand, 2004; Rosand, 1972.

⁸⁸ Classicizing paintings of the Renaissance painting could rarely be defined as a direct return to classical painterly sources, since those sources remained unknown except through literary accounts. From the early Renaissance, painting could therefore be extolled in terms of its "rediscovery of nature", while sculpture and architecture allowed a more vigorous profession of "rediscovery of the Antique". Nonetheless, these two injunctions became inextricably bound, notably in the writing of Vasari. See Panofsky, 1960, 19-30.

⁸⁹ Scott, 1991.

same period).⁹⁰ Seen properly, much of the classicism of Renaissance and later art consists not of finite acts of quotation, but of a process (as the ‘-ism’ of the word implies) that relies on the cross-fertilisation of antique and contemporary.⁹¹ This idea is particularly clear in relation to Michelangelo’s *Crouching Boy*. In contrast to Titian’s painting, the sculpture refers to no classical subject in particular. It is impossible to describe without dwelling on the way in which it conflates, changes and thus obscures classical models, glancing at them without resorting to explicit reference.⁹² To the extent that the *Crouching Boy* resembles the *Spinario*, the resemblance is psychological as much as aesthetic, translating what Leonard Barkan, has described as the *Spinario*’s “narcissistic composition” and “intense self-concentration”.⁹³ To refer to him simply as an adaptation of one or more classical sculptures is to bypass or, worse, deny the sculpture’s crucial attribute – the psychological quality of self-containment and interiority. Then there is the fact that Michelangelo’s *Crouching Boy* is apparently unfinished. Even if this was accidental on the artist’s part, it unavoidably inflects the way in which we interpret the sculpture. In its rough-hewn form, it might either be seen as a modern transgression against the ideal of classical realism, or alternatively as acquiring a peculiarly classical resonance – dramatising the very process of corporeal form emerging from formless stone, or more plaintively, prefiguring the damage to ancient sculptures wrought by time. Either way, the work engages with the aesthetic of ancient statuary in ways that go beyond its engagement with specific artworks.

What we have seen from the examples of Titian and Michelangelo is that to distil a typically classicizing Renaissance artwork into a set of discrete classical components constitutes a limiting way of looking not only at Renaissance artworks but at classical imports. Titian’s painting and Michelangelo’s sculpture do not simply attest the transposition of ancient aesthetics or myths into the present, but rather the way in which present-day context indelibly and necessarily overlays and refracts that cultural inheritance. Lorenzo de Medici’s garden, the Belvedere Courtyard, Titian’s reading (indeed his glossing or misreading) of Ovid’s

⁹⁰ On classical copies and neoclassical emulations in the eighteenth century, see Chapter 4, n. 57.

⁹¹ Porter, 2006, 10-19, especially 18-19.

⁹² On parallels between the *Crouching Venus*, *Spinario*, and *Arrotino*, see Barkan, 1999, 144-150. Howard notes that the *Crouching Boy* “was attributed to Michelangelo after 1750; and it also brings to mind the boy inspecting his toes in the Olympia East Pediment, discovered a century later and not described by Pausanias”: Howard, 2003, 52. In other words, if the sculpture is by Michelangelo, it chimes with classical statuary that the artist couldn’t have known. Evocation of the classical *in general* is what matters.

⁹³ Barkan, 1999, 153.

Metamorphoses – the artist, the work and its context, and the viewer – are intrinsic to the act of reception and the formulation of meaning.⁹⁴

By concentrating briefly on Vasari's story of Michelangelo's tutelage in Lorenzo de Medici's garden, we find a dramatic metaphor for the way in which meaning is engendered – both through the artist's modern-day encounter with antiquity and through the viewer's encounter with the new work. Vasari dwells not on the ancient sculptures populating the garden, but on Michelangelo's creation of his own *Laughing Faun*,⁹⁵ and Lorenzo's amused reaction to it: "when he saw that Michelangelo had departed a little from the model and followed his own fancy in hollowing out a mouth for the faun and giving it a tongue and all its teeth, Lorenzo laughed in his usual charming way and said: 'But you should have known that old folk never have all their teeth and there are always some missing.' In his simplicity Michelangelo, who loved and feared that lord, reflected that this was true, and as soon as Lorenzo had gone he broke one of the faun's teeth and dug into the gum so that it looked as if the tooth had fallen out".⁹⁶ This story, a portrayal of Michelangelo at a formative moment, focuses not on antique influences but on the 'here and now' of Florence in the 1490s. Michelangelo is presented as willing to adapt, even to assail, his own creation. This suggests not only an absence of fidelity to any single classical model, but a conception of the artwork as a living and malleable entity – actualised and even transformed in the moment of reception.⁹⁷ To the extent that there is a classical model, it has grown old in Lorenzo's eyes.

Classicizing works of the High Renaissance, therefore, mark a renunciation of classical models and an assertion of modernity, as much as an act of homage, and this dual movement towards and away from the classical anticipates the more pronounced paradox at the heart of Modernist art and discourse, discussed in the following section. Titian and Michelangelo's works assert their contemporaneity as much as they look back reverentially. It is the simultaneous invocation of ancient tradition, and reaction against it, that makes both works outstanding and original – as opposed to pastiche or slavish imitation. Their capacity to be classical – in the traditional sense – *and* modern, and moreover for that dualism to be

⁹⁴ For a literary critical parallel in the concept of 'reader response', see Martindale, 1993, 1-18. Cf. Duchamp: "It is the viewers who make the painting." Schuster, 1957. Quoted in Schwarz, 2000, 49, n. 4.

⁹⁵ Michelangelo's learning from Renaissance masters (such as Donatello and Masaccio) is equally emphasised: Vasari, 1987a, 331-332.

⁹⁶ Vasari, 1987a, 330.

⁹⁷ On this story as a self-conscious fiction, see Barolsky, 1990, 29-34.

indistinct (as in the case of the reclining nymph who might or might not be Ariadne), has bearing on this thesis's argument that art of recent decades invokes the classical tradition even as it reacts against it or shakes it off, often at the same moment.

4. Modernism: a break from the classical?

Long before the advent of Modernism with its rhetoric of rupture as opposed to revival, it is possible for art to express a relationship with antiquity that goes beyond and against the quoting of definable models. When we turn to modern and contemporary works that express a very different attitude towards the classical past from those of Titian and Michelangelo, it becomes still more imperative that we reconfigure 'influence' altogether. What is, or was, that different attitude? This section begins with Auguste Rodin (a crucial link between Michelangelo and modern art, and a sculptor whose work we will return to in Chapters 2 and 3), and proceeds to two prominent theorists of Modernism, and two iconic works of modern art, in order to argue that the commonplace narrative of a Modernist break from the past belies a more nuanced reality.

In the previous section, we saw how Michelangelo's *Crouching Boy* might be viewed as classical and non-classical in equal measure, equivocating between naturalistic beauty and crude blockiness. In this respect, the *Crouching Boy* might be said to anticipate the sculpture of Rodin. Both in his works and pronouncements, Rodin represented a significant 'bridge' between the art of antiquity and European Modernism; he serves, therefore, as a useful starting-point for arguing that Modernism was anything but a break from antiquity – even in its most iconoclastic moments.

Like Michelangelo, Rodin was a passionate admirer of the antique, as well as a prolific collector of ancient sculpture.⁹⁸ But he was also a radically modern sculptor who departed from academic classicizing conventions – for instance depositing sculptures from their marble plinths and bringing them into contact with the ground, literally eliding the space between 'high art' and daily reality.⁹⁹ Rodin famously claimed in 1906: "My liberation from academicism was via Michelangelo. He is the bridge by which I passed from one circle to

⁹⁸ On Rodin's collection, see Garnier, 2002. On Rodin's art and antiquity, see Picard, 2013.

⁹⁹ For nineteenth-century views of Rodin's dual classicism and modernity, see Rosenfeld, 1981, 84-85, 88.

another. He is the powerful Geryon that carried me.”¹⁰⁰ The import of this statement, as we will see, is that the act of innovation or striding forward – the progression “from one circle to another” – was predicated on a glance back to the art and mythology of antiquity through the layers of interceding receptions, specifically the poetry of Dante (whose fourteenth-century *Inferno* reinvented the mythological giant Geryon), and the sculpture of Michelangelo. For Rodin, modernity was concomitant with a ranging movement through the western tradition.

To what extent might Rodin’s Janus-faced conception of modernity be applied more broadly to modern art, when we come to consider the art and discourse of the last hundred years? The widespread and popular conception is that modern art since the nineteenth century has moved away from such a balance towards outright rejection of the classical past, or pure indifference.¹⁰¹ By the time we reach the 1990s, this transition, away from classical subjects and from traditional (thus classical) techniques, appears to be complete. The Turner Prize, held annually in Britain since 1984 and largely at the Tate Gallery (renamed Tate Britain in 2000), has come to symbolise the abandonment of classical methodologies and media.¹⁰² Championing conceptual art over painting and sculpture, the event became synonymous in the 1990s with a number of ‘epoch-defining’ works (despite the fact that the prize was not given to individual artworks) including Emin’s *unmade bed* and Damien Hirst’s *Mother and Child (Divided)* (1993; figs. 12, 37-39), a bisected cow and calf encased in four vitrines of formaldehyde, which was exhibited as part of the 1995 prize.¹⁰³ Literal and abject, such installations struck many viewers as an affront to the traditions of British painting and sculpture as embodied by the Tate’s permanent collection, and perhaps in particular to J.M.W. Turner – after whom the prize was named – himself an exponent of scenes of classical myth and history (although such an inference itself overlooks the radicalism, in its day, of Turner’s art).¹⁰⁴ ‘Shock art’ became a byword for the new art of the 1990s.¹⁰⁵

But how accurate is the assumption of outright rejection or indifference? In its seeming affront to tradition, the art of recent decades has to be understood first and foremost within the context of Modernism: it is with Modernism that the idea of a break with the classics was

¹⁰⁰ Rodin in a letter to Antoine Bourdelle, 1906. Quoted in Varnedoe, 1985b, 19. On Rodin’s debt to Michelangelo, see Fergonzi *et al*, 1997.

¹⁰¹ See n. 17 and n. 106. On the progressive ‘marginalisation’ of classical academe, see Stray, 1998.

¹⁰² Stallabrass, 1999, 185; Muir, 2009, 179-181; Button, 1999, 15-29.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholson, 1990.

¹⁰⁵ On the YBAs’ and ‘shock art’, see Reardon, 2010, 198.

written into Art History. At their most histrionic, Modernist art and rhetoric appeared to reject the classical tradition – as exemplified by Titian, Michelangelo, or indeed Turner – emancipating art from classicizing reference and ultimately from mimetic styles of representation.¹⁰⁶ Modernism would appear, in this way, to provide the model and rationale for contemporary art’s anti-classical or non-classical stance. As Elizabeth Prettejohn has detailed, Modernist art and theory of the early twentieth century was often characterised by vociferous rejection of the classical past, combined with an ardent celebration of the ‘new’.¹⁰⁷ Artists and theorists strove to begin ‘at the beginning’, as if art were being reborn – although this rebirth was a very different kind of Renaissance, predicated not on the revival of the classical but its erasure. In Britain, the spirit of the age was encapsulated in the rallying cry of poet Ezra Pound, one of Modernism’s chief demagogues: “Make it new”.¹⁰⁸

Pound’s writing exemplifies the way in which the spirit of innovation could appear to be bound up with a rejection of classical art. In a famous debate with the poet Richard Aldington in the pages of *The Egoist*, Pound referred pejoratively to “the caressability of the Greeks”.¹⁰⁹ His invective had been prompted by philosopher T.E. Hulme’s lecture of 1914, ‘Modern Art and its Philosophy’, a landmark assault on the pre-eminent status afforded to mimetic art over previous centuries.¹¹⁰ In a letter to the magazine of 16 March, Pound asserted the redundancy of the “Antique” as a benchmark for appraising the quality of new art:

Art is not particularly concerned with the caressable, the physically attractive. The modern renaissance, or awakening, is very largely due to the fact that we have ceased to regard a work of art as good or bad in accordance with whether it approaches or recedes from the ‘Antique,’ the ‘classical’ models.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ On anti-classical rhetoric among Modernist artists and theorists, see Prettejohn, 171-178. Cf. Chipp, 1968, 294-295. On the characterisation of Modernism as a rupture with history – and autonomous from society – see Meecham and Sheldon, 2000, 1-31; Harrison, 1996, 142. On problems in defining Modernism and modernity, see Gaiger, 2003, 21-27.

¹⁰⁷ Prettejohn, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ *Make it New* is the title of a 1934 collection of Pound’s essays and also appears in the *Cantos*, e.g. ‘Canto LIII’.

¹⁰⁹ Pound, 1914b. The letter was in response to Aldington, 1914. It was followed in the same issue by ‘Mr. Gaudier Brzeska on The New Sculpture’, *The Egoist*, I, 6, 16 March 1914, 117-118. For an analysis of the debate in *The Egoist*, see Prettejohn, 2012, 175-181; Collecott, 2000. On Pound’s engagement with the London avant-garde, see Beasley, 2007, 73-111; Humphreys *et al.*, 1985. On British criticism of the early twentieth century, and its genealogy of modern art as a progression into abstraction, see Beasley, 2006, 65.

¹¹⁰ On Hulme, see Prettejohn, 2012, 179-189; Beasley, 2006.

¹¹¹ Pound, 1914a.

In direct opposition to the Renaissance view, expounded by Vasari, of art being awakened and elevated through its discovery of classical models, Pound seemingly proposes that the “modern renaissance” in art has come about through the very redundancy of those models. Yet Pound’s term is itself telling, giving the lie to the claim of drastic originality: his profession of self-conscious disengagement from the past employs a word (“renaissance”) that cannot help but invoke the past.¹¹² Even by defining the “wild” and “savage” new art in terms of *what it is not*, he affords status and meaning to the antique tradition he regards as irrelevant.¹¹³ This points to what Prettejohn has identified as the central paradox of Modernism’s supposed repudiation of the classical: while acknowledging that “the story of modernism in the visual arts can be told as a sequence of repudiations, more or less violent, of the Greek ideal in general, and ancient sculpture in particular”, she points out the irony inherent in a project of ‘making it new’ that was premised so heavily on “debunking the old.”¹¹⁴

The very act of measuring up to the past thus renders the past indispensable – if only as a foil for the ‘modern’. The proclamation of newness requires an evaluation of what is to be considered old and potentially moribund. An equivalent idea was articulated by the American critic Clement Greenberg, one of the key theorists of Modernism in art, in his influential essay ‘Modernist Painting’ (originally composed in 1960, and published in its definitive form in 1965), in which he traced the abstract painting of his own day back to the modern painting of the mid-nineteenth century: “Modernism has never meant, and does not mean now, anything like a break with the past. It may mean a devolution, an unraveling, of tradition, but it also means its further evolution.”¹¹⁵ Greenberg’s statement, one of the culminating definitions of artistic Modernism, might seem to contradict Pound’s rhetoric of repudiation. But arguably it should be seen to echo and extend Pound’s meaning.

¹¹² “Renaissance” as an art-historical term was first used by Jules Michelet in *Histoire de France au seizième siècle: Renaissance* (1855), and enshrined by Jacob Burckhardt in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). As Silk *et al*, 2014, point out, Vasari had already identified a *rinascità* in the visual arts in 1550: *ibid*, 15.

¹¹³ These terms appear in Pound, 1914a.

¹¹⁴ Prettejohn, 2012, 172.

¹¹⁵ ‘Modernist Painting’ was originally a radio broadcast in 1961 – reprinted in Frascina and Harris, 1992, 313. For the 1965 essay, see Frascina *et al*, 1982, 5-10. On Greenberg’s role in defining Modernism, and use of earlier Modernist formulations, see Gaiger, 2003, 22-23.

By comparing these two theorists, writing in the distinct contexts of Europe in the early twentieth century and America at the culmination of Modernism in the visual arts,¹¹⁶ it is possible to see how Modernism was invested in (and depended on) the classical tradition from the beginning – according with Rodin’s sense of a “liberation” proceeding out of tradition. When we look closely at Pound’s 1914 letter, it becomes clear that his censure was reserved for a particular ‘Hellenizing’ tendency among certain artistic and literary contemporaries – above all the tendency to extol naturalistic Greek art as the highest form of perfection and beauty – rather than the entire canon of Greek art.¹¹⁷ Pound went on to argue, in more concessionary terms: “we have come to recognise that Greek work was not a uniform and unattainable perfection, but that out of a lot of mediocre work; out of a lot of remnants and fragments there remain certain masterpieces to be set apart and compared with other masterpieces from Egypt and from India and from China, and possibly from the south seas and from other districts equally remote from Victorian or Patersque culture”.¹¹⁸ This idea of reapportioning the fragments of the classical tradition within an international context was the task of Pound’s own poetic ‘translations’ of Greek tragedy, in which he alternated between quotations from the original Greek and assorted historical and modern dialects in different languages.¹¹⁹ It closely prefigures Greenberg’s concept of “devolution” or “unraveling” of tradition.

Even leaving aside the paradox of Modernism’s vaunted ‘break’ from the past, the notion of a rejection of the classical is simply at odds with the material record. There are numerous references throughout Modernist art – from the implicit to the explicit – to ancient art and myth. Giorgio de Chirico’s ‘Metaphysical’ paintings, for example, imagine fragments of classical statuary amid elongated, perspectival settings: *The Song of Love* (1914; fig. 13) pictures the head of the *Apollo Belvedere* beside a rubber glove – an ambiguous tableau of displacement and decapitation.¹²⁰ In 1931, Picasso made a series of etchings illustrating Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.¹²¹ In the context of British art, Francis Bacon’s epochal triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) was inspired, in part, by the

¹¹⁶ On the 1960s, and Greenberg’s mature writings, as the end-point of Modernism, see Gaiger, 2003, 28.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Porter, 2006, 5: “Western culture remains predominantly under the spell of Hellenism.”

¹¹⁸ Pound, 16 March 1914.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. Pound’s translation of Sophocles’s *Electra*: Pound, 2003, 993-1063. Cf. Pound, 1954, on different levels on poetry. On Pound as translator, see Xie, 1999. Cf. Ellman, 1987, 112.

¹²⁰ Braun, 2014; Wolin, 2004, xx-xxii.

¹²¹ Florman, 2000.

Furies of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.¹²² Prettejohn points out that such instances of the 'Modernist classical', at least in regard to sculpture, "have been relatively neglected, perhaps due to an increasing scholarly specialization that makes them hard for those without archaeological training to recognise, perhaps because of the persistence of the myth of a total break".¹²³ But classical myth, in particular, constitutes a crucial line of continuity between antiquity and Modernism, one which is unimpaired – even invigorated – by the devaluation of mimesis as a representational ideal.¹²⁴

The avant-garde rejection of the antique was, therefore, more complex and contradictory than has been supposed.¹²⁵ By concentrating once again on a painting and a sculpture – each a celebrated and notorious example of Modernist innovation – we may see how artworks enact this equivocal form of rejection. The first example, Pablo Picasso's painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)* (1907, first publicly displayed in 1916; fig. 14) is one of the defining works of European Modernism, and might serve as the emblem of what Pound called the "modern renaissance".¹²⁶ It is a portrayal of five nude prostitutes from a brothel on the Carrer d'Avinyó in Barcelona. Their bodies, standing or squatting, are simplified and segmented into angular plateaux of flesh tone; and in a typically Modernist synthesis of divergent aesthetic traditions, their faces are depicted alternately in a naïve pre-Roman Iberian idiom and (in the case of the two figures on the right) the faceted structures of African masks, regarded as harbingers of Cubism.¹²⁷ The critic Leo Steinberg, writing in 1972, described the scene in lurid terms that sought to capture the initial shock it produced, as "five bedeviled

¹²² Bacon, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944), Tate Britain, London: N06171. On Bacon's debt to Aeschylus, see Sylvester, 1980, 44-45, 112; Russell, 1979, 24. On the *rappel à l'ordre* following the First World War, see Loreti, 2011, 18-19.

¹²³ Prettejohn, 2012, 177; cf. Goldstein, 1996, 155-158. Recent exhibitions exploring Modernist art's debt to the classical include 'The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920 – 1950', Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, 22 October 2016 to 19 February 2017; 'Modern Antiquity' (n. 50); and 'Chaos and Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936', Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1 October 2010 to 9 January 2011.

¹²⁴ See Martin 2016; Green and Daehner, 2011; Silver 2010. On the capacity of myth to translate across cultures and periods, see Zajko and O'Gorman, 2013, 10; Morales, 2007. Cf. Roland Barthes's description of mythologies (albeit modern-day ones) as a "constantly moving turnstile": Barthes, 1973, 133.

¹²⁵ The military term "avant-garde", often a synonym for Modernism, was first used in this metaphorical sense by Claude Henri de Saint-Simon in *Opinions Littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (1825). See Meechan and Sheldon, 2000, 15-26.

¹²⁶ The painting was first exhibited in July 1916 at the Salon d'Antin, Paris. It was acquired by MoMA in 1939. On immediate reactions, see Barr, 1939, 57. Steinberg, 1972b, provides a seminal analysis in terms of stylistic rupture. On the painting's canonicity, see Harrison *et al.*, 1993, 105; Ginzburg, 2000; Settis, 2006, 96-97. See also Rubin *et al.*, 1994; Green, 2001; Brilliant, 2000a, 87-90.

¹²⁷ Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler recognised the painting's anticipation of Cubism in *Der Weg zum Kubismus*, written in 1915 and published in Munich in 1920: Kahnweiler, 1949, 6-7.

viragos whose sexual offering, visually inescapable, was decivilizing, disfiguring, and demoniacal”.¹²⁸ The influence of ‘primitive’ tribal art has been described as working to “liberate an utterly original artistic style of compelling, even savage force.”¹²⁹ As for classical styles and subjects, Picasso would later impugn the antique “canon” as an imprisoning convention – the standard against which art had long been measured – in pointed contrast to his freedom through Primitivism: “Academic training in beauty is a sham... The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, nymphs, Narcissuses, are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon.”¹³⁰

But even from a conventional analysis of the painting’s structure and iconography, it is clear that Picasso was bound by tradition – specifically that of classicizing art – even as he sought to liberate himself through African and Iberian influences. For all the painting’s iconoclasm (as far as the western tradition is concerned), it is structurally reminiscent of Titian’s *Diana and Actaeon* and its companion piece, *Diana and Callisto* – works that, as we have seen, epitomise classicism in post-antique art. Like Titian, Picasso presents a clustered group of nude women within a curtained setting that mediates between indoor and outdoor; the figures are variously seated and upright, so as to produce multiple diagonal axes running through the picture; and their flesh is copiously displayed. The very spectacle of a nude in a landscape encourages classical analogies: since the Renaissance, nudity had served the purpose of dignifying, or defusing the erotic charge of, the naked subject.¹³¹

Moreover, at the level of individual figures and motifs, Picasso’s painting stands up to the mode of analysis that was described earlier in this Introduction – that of ‘finding’ classical models. This is especially clear when the painting is compared with its numerous preparatory studies. As art historian Richard Brilliant has observed: “the traditional art-historical approach to this enormous painting has concentrated on discovering prior models and/or precedents in Western art. [...] This interpretive protocol follows the familiar pattern of treating the painting as a puzzle, as if to disentangle the various elements out of which Picasso allegedly composed his work”.¹³²

¹²⁸ Steinberg, 1972b, 43.

¹²⁹ Hunter *et al*, 2004, 135-136.

¹³⁰ Picasso as reported by Zervos, 1935. The English translation is from Barr, 1946. Reprinted in Chipp, 1968, 266-271 (271). Cf. the decial of classical models in Boccioni, 1968.

¹³¹ Squire, 2011, 69-79. See also n. 63.

¹³² Brilliant, 2000a, 87-88. Cf. Leo Steinberg’s 1988 postscript to his original essay: “the scouting for ‘look-alikes’ is a diverting sport, releasing us from the difficulty of holding a picture in focus”. Steinberg, 1972b, 73.

Those elements may well include Titian's Actaeon: early sketches for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* show 'sailors' within the scene – initially two, at the centre and left of the picture, and later just the left-hand figure who intrudes upon the brothel scene in the manner of Actaeon.¹³³ In the final painting, the left-hand *demoiselle* who raises the curtain with an out-flung arm likewise recalls Actaeon in both deed and disposition. Another putative classical reference lurks in the model (second from the left) who stands with one arm arching behind her head: in studies, she is depicted in a seated position that echoes the crouching nymph in Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (and thus, by extension, the *Crouching Aphrodite*), and the *Spinario*. In her final transformation in the painting, she takes on the appearance of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (1513-16; fig. 15), whose raised arm chimes in turn with that of the central figure of the *Laocoön*. Similar deductions can be made in relation to small details: the bunch of grapes in the centre of the picture is redolent of classical subjects – whether the fable of Zeuxis and Parrhasius (discussed in Chapter 2), or as a metonym of the god Bacchus. Finally, on a stylistic level, the painting cannot escape classical paradigms: irrespective of representational content, we might readily equate the planar appearance of Picasso's women with archaic sculptural schemata.¹³⁴

Through the filters of Titian or Michelangelo, therefore, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* refers to various ancient models, just as Dürer accessed classical models via Italian Renaissance interpretations, or Rodin looked back to antiquity via Michelangelo and Dante. Even the painting's most 'modern' aspect – the proto-Cubist scheme of planes and arcs – brings to mind the aesthetics of archaic (or 'early classical' or 'pre-classical' art). Picasso's "utterly original artistic style" was, it seems, dependent for its force on an acknowledgment and an accommodation of the art of the past, primarily the classical past – and a changing classical past, at that, when one considers that archaic art was a nineteenth-century 'discovery'.¹³⁵ Revolutionary and shocking as the painting was when it was unveiled, it bears out

¹³³ "According to my first idea, there were also going to be men in the painting [...] There was a student holding a skull, and a sailor." Picasso in an interview of 2 December 1933 with Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Quoted in Chipp, 1968, 266. Green, 2006, argues that Picasso would have been aware of Titian's painting through a copy at the Prado: *ibid.*, 44-49. On specific correspondences between *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*, see Cowling, 2002, 171-172.

¹³⁴ Cf. Prettejohn, 2012, 181-203.

¹³⁵ Prettejohn, 2012, 190-203.

Prettejohn's contention that "for all the stridency of the repudiations, modern art never purged itself of the habit of reference to ancient sculpture".¹³⁶

But if Picasso's painting falls back on classical and classicizing precedents even in the act of presenting a picture of "sheer expressionist violence and barbaric intensity",¹³⁷ what of a work that seems to dispense with the very idea of representation? Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917; fig. 2) is perhaps the most iconoclastic work of the twentieth century, and significantly (from the point of view of this thesis), one that has been alluded to serially by contemporary artists.¹³⁸ If Emin's *My Bed* has a key Modernist paradigm, it is this – a mass-manufactured urinal upturned by ninety degrees and presented as a sculpture (signed by the artist "R. Mutt"). An editorial in the second issue of Dada journal *The Blind Man* (anonymous yet suspected to be by Duchamp: it was also signed "R. Mutt") summed up the revolutionary gesture in the following laconic terms: "Whether Mr Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for the object."¹³⁹ The implication of a neutral and arbitrary choice – as if the urinal were no more or less meaningful than any other "article of life" – highlights the way in which apathy (or the disavowal of intention) can itself become an authorial decision or stance.¹⁴⁰ In the chapters which follow, this stance will be seen to be echoed in contemporary artists' denials of specific intention.

Duchamp's sculptural readymade was created four years after the artist had abandoned painting as purely "retinal art".¹⁴¹ In eschewing representational norms, it appears to dispense with any of the modes of classical reference or influence that were articulated by Titian and Michelangelo's works – whether those of theme, iconography, or even a basic claim to mimetic realism. If Picasso's painting achieved its brutal immediacy through a bold geometric style and the stark outward gazes of its subjects, Duchamp's work achieves a still greater immediacy by apparently stepping outside the accepted parameters of art.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 177.

¹³⁷ Barr, 1939, 60.

¹³⁸ See n. 2.

¹³⁹ n.a., 1917, 5.

¹⁴⁰ On Duchamp's 'conceit' of indifference, see Gell, 1998, 30. For a critique of Duchamp's claimed neutrality, cf. Ramírez, 1998, 54.

¹⁴¹ Tomkins, 1968, 9.

How, we might ask, can *Fountain* be said to represent anything when it constitutes no more than a piece of untransformed reality? When Duchamp submitted the piece to the Society of Independent Artists in December 1916, it was rejected by the committee on the basis that it didn't qualify as art, foreshadowing some of the indictments of British art at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁴² It is indeed as a piece of 'anti-art' that *Fountain* has become a paradigm of the Modernist break with the history of art stretching back to antiquity: it powerfully voices the idea that one way of art being great, and not just good, is that it has to raise, provocatively, the question of *what art is*, thereby always claiming to break with tradition.¹⁴³

However, as we have seen in relation to the theorisation of Modernism, to break with tradition, one nonetheless needs to know what that tradition is. For all that it reacts against the canons of classical and classicizing art, Duchamp's *Fountain* – in its demand to be regarded as a piece of sculpture – may be seen also to invoke and uphold those canons, however subversively. More significantly still, the claim of decisive Modernist rupture is not borne out by a close analysis of the artwork. In its very name, for example, Duchamp's *Fountain* implies some kind of relationship with the sculptural fountains of the Renaissance or of ancient Rome that we have already referenced in this chapter.¹⁴⁴ It is telling that he decided to call the work *Fountain* as opposed to *Urinal*: the assignment of an allusive (rather than denotative) title allows the functionless urinal to become a dramatic idea – as if it could, after all, belong to the tradition of representational sculpture. Simultaneously, the title imbues the object with a public or even civic import, as opposed to the private and desultory status it possesses as a urinal.

By invoking a thematic and formal paradigm of classical antiquity, Duchamp's *Fountain* demands to be analysed and appreciated on the same terms as classical and classicizing artworks. More than this, its material and shape invite analogies with historical sculpture. To borrow Pound's terminology, *Fountain* might be said to constitute an object of Grecian "caressability": it can be appreciated, or disparaged, aesthetically on the same terms as the Greek marbles to which Pound referred, even as it appears to transgress against the high

¹⁴² Ramírez, 1998, 52; Camfield, 1989, 20-21. On the YBAs see n. 14, 16.

¹⁴³ On *Fountain*'s mediation between 'art' and 'anti-art', see Camfield, 1991.

As Chapter 4 will argue, mechanical reproduction is not at odds with Roman practices. Nor is the idea of an absent original: *Fountain* – serially replicated yet lost in its 1917 form – became the epitome of the artwork *as an idea*, existing only in reproductions.

¹⁴⁴ Rinne, 2010.

classical ideal of the human figure that such marbles embodied. Indeed, it *must* be capable of sitting within such a discursive frame in order to qualify as sculpture – as something worthy of artistic study and appreciation, rather than a common utility.

This is clear from Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of *Fountain* (produced under Duchamp's guidance, and now the only surviving record of the original), which also appeared in *The Blind Man* in 1917 (fig. 16). In this, the urinal's formalist sculptural allure is made manifest: it is elevated on a plinth and accented by chiaroscuro, shot against a darkened fragment of a painting.¹⁴⁵ Even though *Fountain* doesn't refer to an ancient statue or myth, its polished porcelain form and conventional (classical) mode of presentation in Stieglitz's photograph readily align it with art that sits more squarely in the classical tradition, including the examples surveyed above. This affinity was clear from the outset: the poet Louise Norton, in an essay accompanying the publication of Stieglitz's photograph, proposed (albeit in high-flown terms that border on parody) that the object gives pleasure through its "chaste simplicity of line and color [...] *Fountain* was not made by a plumber but by the force of an imagination".¹⁴⁶ (Expanding the frame of reference in which *Fountain* might be understood as art, Norton also remarked that contemporary viewers had seen resonances of the Buddha or Cézanne's nudes). In Norton's appraisal – which extracts the urinal from its habitual context and sets it in an art-historical pattern – we find a close prefiguration of Tracey Emin's 'epiphany' before her unmade bed: "And then from one second looking horrible it suddenly transformed itself into something removed from me, something outside of me, and something beautiful. I suddenly imagined it out of that context, frozen, outside of my head, in another place."¹⁴⁷

Clearly, therefore, the classical aspects of Duchamp's *Fountain* were discernible from the outset, even as those properties ("chaste simplicity" of form, or the capacity to allude to a sculpted body) were channelled into the subversive new idiom of the readymade. While Norton's defence of the work was tongue-in-cheek, it clearly reveals that the discourse

¹⁴⁵ Stieglitz's photograph, indicating how the work was intended to be displayed at the Exhibition of Independent Artists, includes Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors* (1913), whose undulations pick up on those of the urinal: Tomkins, 1997, 183-186. For a roughly contemporaneous example of photographic framing of everyday objects as quasi-classical 'works', cf. the Egyptian archaeological site reports of Sir William M. Flinders Petrie: e.g. *ibid.*, 2013, 34.

¹⁴⁶ Norton, 1917. The phrase "chaste simplicity" was used by sculptor John Flaxman as an epithet for classical art: the work of Michelangelo "rarely possesses the chaste simplicity of Grecian art." Flaxman, 1829, 318. Variants of the term are ubiquitous from Winckelmann onwards.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Freedman *et al.*, 2006, 252.

surrounding the most startlingly ‘modern’ of works continued to have recourse to established modes of analysis: the ‘old’ language of Art History could be brought to bear on the radically ‘new’. By extension, we can infer that modern ways of seeing shared much with those of the past, however far the definitions of art had been stretched. Simply in terms of its literalism, that quality which seems most shockingly anti-art and anti-classical, Duchamp’s *Fountain* might be seen to fulfil the classical ideal of consummate realism. This idea of the found object as an apotheosis of realism will be developed in Chapter 2.

The examples of Picasso and Duchamp explicate, in visual terms, what Prettejohn identified as the paradox of Modernism’s repudiation of the classical. They show that the most radically *new* of artistic gestures cannot avoid being contextualised in relation to ancient models. More than this, they seem actively to invite and profit from such contextualisation. Rodin’s self-conscious and programmatic idea of looking back to antiquity via interceding receptions may be applied to modern artworks, regardless of whether their creators sought to refer directly (or at all) to the classical. Whether or not the artist frames the work as classical, viewers may apprehend the classicism of the ‘iconoclastic’ modern work, identifying the ways in which the work corresponds with classical forms or concepts. And so the Modernist avant-garde, often theorised as a decisive jettisoning of cherished artistic ideals (whether mythological or heroic types, or the principle of mimesis), is better understood as challenging and pushing those ideals to their limits. To make sense as art, it can only be understood in terms of those ideals.

5. Reconfiguring ‘influence’

So far, this chapter has broadly outlined three ‘ways of seeing’ the relationship between post-classical art and the classical past. There is the conventional envisioning of classical influence, as reflected in the art-historical method of distilling classicism into finite figures and themes. Then there is the Modernist narrative of a decisive break from the past, a narrative that was always more rhetorical than real; and last (as a qualification of the former), the idea – advanced by Prettejohn – of the paradox that is inherent in the act of repudiation. According to this last viewpoint, any putative rejection of the classical tradition (or even outright indifference) entails an acknowledgment of that tradition, if only in terms of what the modern work *is not*. It also potentially affirms the tradition, as in the case of Picasso’s *Les*

Demoiselles d'Avignon with its echoes of ancient statuary, or Duchamp's *Fountain* and its classical sculptural qualities. What the discussion aims to have shown is that there is much more to art's relationship with classical antiquity than conventional tellings – either of classicism in art, or radical Modernist innovation – suggest.

As will be seen, YBA art is emblematic of a long-term phenomenon. It extends – but also intensifies – what we have observed in relation to Renaissance and Modernist art – that 'influence', in the accustomed sense, fails to encapsulate the relationship between the classical and later periods. A number of the case studies in this thesis refer explicitly to ancient precedents – the artist is cognisant of a classical source or model – and yet other case studies evoke ancient myths or statues in the absence of any clear or knowable intention on the part of the artist. In the latter case, we are dealing with 'accidents' rather than 'allusions' in the proper sense.¹⁴⁸ But as we saw with Duchamp's *Fountain*, it is possible for a viewer to perceive 'classical' qualities in an object, once it claims the status of a work of art, regardless of the artist's motives.¹⁴⁹ As the following section explains, British art sits in a different relationship to the classical from its forbears – one which necessitates a new conceptualisation of influence, and a consideration of how (and by whom) meaning is formulated. We shall see how meaning is not simply a manifestation, in visual form, of an artist's motives. Rather, the work's meaning may be understood, through reference to reception theory, as cumulative and evolving – as the product of different responses (including the artist's own) to the given work of art.

5.1 Prettejohn's conceptualisation of influence

Throughout her book *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture* (2012), Elizabeth Prettejohn conceptualises influence in terms that move radically beyond the traditional model; and she traces a precedent for this conceptualisation in Modernist discourse itself. In Hulme's lecture 'Modern Art and its Philosophy' (1914), she proposes, we find "a new basis for how a modern work might relate to the art of the past, which need no longer depend on concepts that imply a cause-and-effect relationship, such as 'influence', 'tradition', or even

¹⁴⁸ See however Conclusion, on the question of the 'accidental' in art.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. n. 49.

‘appropriation’ [...] modernism can have a significant relationship to archaic art, by way of ‘analogy’, which yet does not preclude a radical form of originality.”¹⁵⁰

This statement refers specifically to Hulme’s belief in the affinity between Modernist geometric art and archaic sculpture; and in her précis, Prettejohn perhaps betrays a degree of scepticism as to how far Hulme’s principle of a common mind-set or *Weltanschauung* might be applied.¹⁵¹ Yet the basic idea here of a transhistorical relationship that precludes the “cause-and-effect” model of influence has important bearing on her own underlying argument – namely, that modern sculpture remains implicated, visually and theoretically, in the Greek sculptural tradition, regardless of its disavowal or ignorance of that tradition. That is, modern sculpture is bound to antiquity at the level of visual correspondences – correspondences which may or may not have been intended – but more importantly by the analogies that can be drawn, by critics such as Hulme as well as by other viewers, between some of the underlying precepts of Modernism and classical archaeology, for instance the attribution of ‘simplicity’ to archaic and Modernist sculpture alike.

5.2 *How this thesis differs*

Such a reconfiguring of influence offers an important theoretical model for this thesis. My aim is to demonstrate that contemporary art in the west does respond to ancient art and ancient ideas surrounding art; indeed, it must do so in order to attain the status of art. But we need to regard ‘response’ as betokening more than an explicit or knowing act of reference on the part of the artist. Resemblances between ancient and contemporary artworks – affinities of theme, or aesthetic, or of what might loosely be called ‘aura’ – need not signify causation of an unambiguous kind.¹⁵² By setting the classical and contemporary beside one another, we might discover ways of reading each through the other – precluding the need to define them as ‘precedent’ and ‘response’, and laying an emphasis on the role of the viewer in the construction of meaning. (An attendant question, which will be implicit throughout this thesis

¹⁵⁰ Prettejohn, 2012, 184-185.

¹⁵¹ “The ‘analogy’ will be apparent, not in the form of resemblance, but rather in the perception – indeed it is only a ‘guess’ – that both the past and present work relate somehow to the kind of *Weltanschauung* that accompanies geometrical art.” Ibid. Cf. *ibid.*, 198, on Aristide Maillol’s affinity with early Greek sculpture.

¹⁵² On ‘aura’, see Benjamin, 2002.

and returned to in the Conclusion, is whether *any* work of art profits from being analysed through a classical ‘lens’.)

I will adopt an approach that is predominantly visual by contrast with Prettejohn’s focus on archaeological approaches and Modernist treatises and speeches. Art-historical, critical and journalistic texts and contexts will serve as important points of reference, as evidence of the diverse interpretations that works of art have provoked. (Consider, again, Emin’s *My Bed*, which owes much of its ‘aura’ – its notoriety and force – to the journalistic discussions that grew around it in the late 1990s). I will articulate my own responses in relation to those of other viewers, including critics and the artists themselves; indeed, my responses cannot meaningfully be separated from preceding and parallel ones. But the starting point, in each case, will be a direct analysis of a work’s materials, form, or apparent subject. As will be seen, even avowedly conceptual works of art stand up to – or demand – analysis of their physical properties and representational potential. Through this approach, I will identify conventional ‘allusions’ – classical references intended by the artists – while also tracing correspondences with ancient sources which are suggested by the work itself. These correspondences are obvious in many instances (I will argue, for instance, that the bronzed-up faces of Gilbert & George cannot but evoke classical and classicizing statues, notwithstanding the artists’ professed indifference to antiquity). But as Hulme did in relation to Modernist sculpture, I also hope to use such visual congruencies to trace underlying continuities of thought – that is, common ideas about art’s nature and function.

Evidence gathered from interviews with artists – most of them conducted in person – will provide valuable insights into the contexts of contemporary art’s production. These interviews have been conducted in person (with one exception), recorded, and transcribed. As conversations, they represent qualitative research.¹⁵³ Yet they have been structured around common themes that intersect with the concerns of the three chapters – realism, creative hubris, beauty and ugliness, originality, and the nature of the classical. A recent example of this approach, on which this thesis builds, is the book *Liquid Antiquity* (2017).¹⁵⁴ This cross-disciplinary study is comprised of an introductory essay by classicist Brook Holmes,¹⁵⁵ and shorter entries by classicists and art historians arranged into three broad themes (‘Body’,

¹⁵³ Cf. Skinner, 2012, 8-10.

¹⁵⁴ Holmes and Marta, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Holmes, 2017a.

‘Time’ and ‘Institution’), akin to the ‘lenses’ employed in this thesis. Spread throughout the book are artists’ interviews and examples of contemporary artworks, with the latter ranging from clear-cut instances of classicism to works which do not obviously quote from classical models. The interviews and artworks appear alongside short thematic essays (‘lexemes’), each two to three pages in length; and yet the interviews, in particular, are left uninterrogated. This thesis, albeit commenced before the publication of *Liquid Antiquity*, builds on the publication by focusing on contemporary artworks in which the classical is not necessarily ‘signposted’ in the form of postmodern references.¹⁵⁶ But through its interviews, the thesis also seeks to achieve what *Liquid Antiquity* only implicitly advocates – showing what happens when themes are envisaged as *ways of seeing* that provide the opportunity for sustained analysis.

The interviews which have been conducted for this thesis are a key part of its source material – as important an apparatus as the excerpts from art historians such as Panofsky or authors such as Pliny and Ovid. And yet, as shall be seen, the statements of artists can rarely be felt to constitute unambiguous statements of intention. On occasion, they may appear tendentious or opaque; and each has been conducted a long time (sometimes decades) after the creation of the work under discussion, by which time content is inevitably shaped by years of response and ongoing re-situation. Despite this, artists are closer to their works, by necessity, than critics, academics, or other viewers. While their remarks are not integral to their works,¹⁵⁷ their words may nonetheless be seen to extend, frame, or inflect the works’ meanings, in the same way as a title – or the lack of a title – might do.¹⁵⁸ Their words may be analysed in the same way as we analyse their works – as ‘open texts’ rather than unequivocal statements of intention.¹⁵⁹

In many instances, the interviews are revealing precisely because they highlight an artist’s lack of interest (or professed lack of interest) in classical traditions, or because they signal the

¹⁵⁶ For a foundational theorisation of postmodernism in art, see Owens, 1980a and 1980b. Cf. Foster, 1983. On postmodern quotation, see Ulmer, 1983, 89-97. For an attempt to emancipate contemporary art from the ‘postmodern’ category, see Bourriaud, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Even in the case of Gilbert & George, who claim to be ‘living works of art’: their commentary upon their own work is no more or less tendentious than that of other artists. Exceptions may be artists’ manifestos which ask to be read as guiding, justificatory even, e.g. André Breton’s Surrealist Manifestos of 1924 and 1929, or the conceptualist ‘text pieces’ of artists such as Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth. See Ross, 2014, 93-122.

¹⁵⁸ Consider, for example, the insights derived from Sarah Lucas’s disclosure about W.H. Margetson in Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁹ On the ‘open work’, see Eco, 1989, 1-23, 84-104.

artist's belief that the classical resonances of an artwork are for the viewer to deduce as much as for the artist to explicate. For this reason, the statements of artists are not privileged over the conclusions that can be drawn from exposure to the works themselves. By the same token, those ancient artworks whose original creators or contexts are impossible to identify must, by necessity, be interpreted first and foremost in terms of their visual and material properties. The artists' interviews are valuable as 'receptions', an idea that will be discussed below in relation to classical reception: they may function as components of the works' meanings, rather than concretizing or delimiting those meanings.

The role of the interviews thus helps to elucidate the larger question of 'meaning' in contemporary art, and how this differs from the traditional idea of 'influence' that was summarised earlier in the chapter. As we saw from the story of Michelangelo in the garden of Lorenzo de Medici, the artist plays a decisive role in the formulation of a work's meaning – and this is why the testimony of artists, however oblique, remains potentially valuable; but the viewer is equally instrumental.¹⁶⁰ The anecdote underlines the fact that the viewer is a creative agent. It is Lorenzo's response that impels Michelangelo to knock the statue's tooth out; Lorenzo's act of interpretation thus shapes the work's meaning (literally, in this case). When we apply this idea more broadly to the works of art discussed in this thesis – works whose creators often disavow their own part in producing meaning – it will become clear that meaning arises out of a shifting dynamic between artist, work and viewer. Within this dynamic, the artwork itself may be felt to possess agency that transcends the aims of the artist (even where these can be verified). Such an idea of the artwork's receptivity to interpretation has been usefully theorised by the social anthropologist Alfred Gell: "Just as any art object indexes its origins in the activity of an artist, it also indexes its reception by a public, the public it was primarily made 'for' [...] In the course of their careers, art objects can have many receptions."¹⁶¹ Gell conceives these multiple receptions in terms of a "transfer of agency" between the originators and recipients of works of art.¹⁶² This kind of "transfer of agency" is vividly instanced by Emin's recollection of her bed as "something removed from me, something outside of me", in the moment that it became a work of art. Gell's description provides a basis for the idea – outlined in the final section of this Introduction – that

¹⁶⁰ On the "transactional lives" of art objects, divorced from the actions or intentions of the artist, see Gell, 1998, 24, 33-34. Cf. Tanner and Osborne, 2007, 1-27; Mitchell, 1996.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 24. For Barthes, 1977, the balance is less evenly weighted: "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Ibid, 148.

¹⁶² Gell, 1998, 34.

contemporary art might productively be examined from the angle of classical reception studies, with ‘meaning’ understood as a cumulative and ongoing process, in which the only constant is the work of art itself.

We have seen how the classicism of a work of art may lie in an ‘allusion’ (that is, in a conscious reference by the artist), but also in the ability of viewers to recognise – as Hulme did – transhistorical correspondences. Such recognition need not be an unrestrained ‘projection of meaning’.¹⁶³ This thesis aims instead at identifying specific theoretical, formal and material points of continuity between contemporary works and ancient artefacts and texts – a process exemplified by the modalities of the three chapters, and their use of comparative case studies.

5.3 Classicism in YBA art

Literal elements of classicism – such as those we detected in Titian, Michelangelo, Picasso and Duchamp – do remain prolific and easy to find in modern and contemporary art.¹⁶⁴ Even within the confines of the YBA generation, it is possible to find clear classical allusions – for example, references to fragmentary classical statuary in the latest sculptures of Marc Quinn, displayed in 2017 at Sir John Soane’s Museum (fig. 17);¹⁶⁵ or by way of an older example, to Ovidian myth in Mat Collishaw’s *Narcissus* (1990; fig. 20), a photographic self-portrait in which the shirtless artist gazes into a muddy puddle. Looking beyond the context of Britain, there are countless examples of post-war and contemporary artists who have appropriated and reinvented classical sources, from the ‘Neo-Expressionist’ and *Transavanguardia* painters of the 1980s, through the sculptures of Charles Ray or Jeff Koons, to the paintings and drawings

¹⁶³ Whereby, for example, a glass of water can become *An Oak Tree* (the conceit of Michael Craig-Martin’s celebrated installation of 1973). Cf. Marc Quinn in Chapter 2: “almost anything can be classical” – a platitude which this thesis seeks to qualify.

¹⁶⁴ References to classical statue types include Jeff Koons’s *Gazing Ball* sculptures (2013-2014); the works of Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (including a 2009 series parodying Bertel Thorvaldsen’s statues); the collages of Richard Hawkins (e.g. *Treatise on Posteriority*, 2009); the photographs of Louise Lawler (e.g. *The Rude Museum*, 1987); and Bruce Nauman’s video performance *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968). References to classical myth are ubiquitous in contemporary art, whether in the paintings of Cy Twombly (1928-2011); the sculptures and installations of Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010); the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989); the works of *arte povera* artists such as Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Giulio Paolini (see Chapter 4); the videos of American artist Mary Reid Kelley, e.g. *The Thong of Dionysus* (2015) and *Swinburne’s Pasiphae* (2014); or Anish Kapoor’s installation *Marsyas* (2002) at Tate Modern. Contemporary artistic uses of antiquity were the subject of the exhibition ‘Ancient Greece Episode’, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool Biennial, 9 July to 16 October 2016. For further examples see Holmes and Marta, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Marc Quinn: Drawn From Life’, Sir John Soane’s Museum, London, 28 March to 23 September 2017.

of Cy Twombly.¹⁶⁶ We can deconstruct these and other contemporary works in the same way as with Picasso and Duchamp, uncovering or distilling their classical forms and themes. But this remains, in essence, a traditional procedure of ‘looking’ for the classical as if it were a finite and lapidary entity.

My focus on a particular moment in British art is motivated by a desire to move beyond this traditional procedure. While the focus may appear counterintuitive in view of contemporary art’s increasingly international scope, and precludes detailed consideration of artists from international contexts, the rationale has two main thrusts. First, art in London in the 1990s was defined – inwardly and, crucially, outwardly – in terms of its Britishness. Exhibitions such as ‘Brilliant! New Art from London’ at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1996, and ‘Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection’ at the Royal Academy in 1997, framed the YBA phenomenon as a symbol of British culture.¹⁶⁷ The YBAs were regarded as embodying a distinctively British bravado, however eclectic and international their profusion of media and styles.¹⁶⁸ In addition, much of their work tackles the idea of Britishness head-on – whether Mark Wallinger’s *State Britain* (2007), a meticulous replication of placards from Parliament Square protesting the Iraq war, or Sarah Lucas’s *Christ You Know it Ain’t Easy* (2003), an effigy of Jesus coated in cigarettes and mounted on a giant Cross of Saint George. More than this, the ‘classical’ traditions that the YBAs were reacting against include institutions at the heart of British culture (we think here of the Royal Academy in particular).¹⁶⁹ It therefore makes sense to consider how the art of the YBAs – whose nationality was and remains part of their brand – stands in relation to the classical tradition. Did their work sever *British* art from its classical legacy?

Secondly, it is the notoriety of the YBAs in their 1990s heyday that makes their works a provocative, and ultimately revealing, test case for exploring the relationships between the ‘contemporary’ and the ‘classical’. Their reputed hostility or indifference to tradition set them apart from the generations of postmodern artists (in Britain and internationally) who

¹⁶⁶ On Twombly, see Jacobus, 2016.

¹⁶⁷ See Stallabrass, 1999, 195-203, on how this association was exploited for political ends.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. n. 14.

¹⁶⁹ On the Royal Academy, see Fenton, 2006, 88-129; Valentine, 1991. Cf. Chapter 4, n. 25. The bibliography on classicism in Britain is vast. See e.g. Goldhill, 2011, especially 1-20. On nineteenth-century British politics, see especially Majeed, 1999; Vance, 1999. On Classics and education since the nineteenth century, see Stray, 1998. On British art see *inter alia* Gent, 1995; Jenkyns, 1991; Martin, 2016.

immediately preceded and succeeded them. At the same time, their shared historical and geographical context gives their work coherence as an academic category: they emerged largely from one art college, Goldsmiths (where many of them were taught by the conceptual artist Michael Craig-Martin), at the same time as Fine Art was first instituted as a degree subject at the University of London.

The chapters that follow will move between examples of contemporary artworks in which classical reference remains explicit and intentional (Marc Quinn's *Self* in Chapter 3, for example, or Mark Wallinger's deployment of a classical plaster cast in Chapter 4), and works that shy away from classical influence in any conventional sense.¹⁷⁰ By embracing this category of works which seem to have little or nothing to do with antiquity, the thesis approaches classicism as a frame of reference for understanding art – as a cumulative 'tool kit' that has evolved in tandem with art – rather than a universal attribute that can be imputed to contemporary works (as Panofsky does, for example, to Dürer). The thesis will indeed return to the idea that the 'classical' has repeatedly been over-defined, for different purposes and contexts. Rather, the intention is to analyse contemporary artworks in conjunction with specific examples of ancient art and text.¹⁷¹ The identification of classical references or styles – whether they be calculated allusions or 'casual' correspondences – will serve as a starting point rather than an end in itself. It will offer a way into thinking about contemporary art's implication in the classical tradition, that is, in the theories and definitions of art that we might trace back – via the Renaissance – to canonical classical texts, notably Pliny's *Historia naturalis* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the case of artworks that seem indifferent to tradition, it will be argued that their very claim to be viewed *as art* implicates them, ineluctably, within that tradition.

More than the vaunted ruptures of Modernism, British contemporary art puts the very idea of influence under the microscope, asking that we dispense with such a notion when we come to think about what a work of art might mean. Even in those cases where classical reference is unequivocal, 'influence' is an inadequate way of describing what the artist is doing (or not doing). Such works, in line with the most iconoclastic YBA works, do not invite a distillation

¹⁷⁰ In exploring the (un)conventional, it will be necessary sometimes to look beyond the thesis's British focus to international modern and contemporary artists, e.g. *arte povera* in Chapter 4.

¹⁷¹ Methodologies for reading art and text through one another (and not as parallel worlds) are offered by Squire, 2009.

of their putative influences; arguably they cast off the very idea of influence, and place a primary onus on the viewer in constructing a hermeneutic frame. They are ‘texts’ that play with the implications of what Roland Barthes hailed the ‘Death of the Author’, withholding clear statements of authorial intention and being “eternally written *here and now*”.¹⁷² We, the viewers of artworks whose authors have thus ‘decentred’ themselves, are required to play a decisive role in the formulation of meaning. Classicism comes of our response as much as it does from intended niceties of composition, medium or title.¹⁷³

5.4 *Classical reception*

In adopting the approach outlined above, and placing primary emphasis on the ways in which artworks are viewed, this thesis intends to show that contemporary and ancient art are necessarily and inevitably bound together. To this end, it embraces theories of classical reception as expounded over the last two decades. Interdisciplinary by its nature, Classics has encompassed a growing field of activity concerned with post-classical engagements or responses, or what have been termed the “accretions” that have grown around classical texts or artworks.¹⁷⁴ By contrast, scholarship on modern and contemporary art continues to be dominated by gendered, politicised or psychoanalytically-inflected readings.¹⁷⁵ Above all, studies of contemporary art suffer from a narrowness of temporal focus.¹⁷⁶ This narrowness arguably continues to derive from the notion (already shown to be questionable) that Modernism (and hence postmodernism and contemporary art) is fundamentally different from its artistic antecedents, whether in the nineteenth century, the Renaissance, or classical antiquity.¹⁷⁷ By contrast, the broad aim of this thesis is to approach contemporary art from the

¹⁷² Barthes, 1977, 142-148, 145. Cf. Spivey, 1996, 14-15.

¹⁷³ This is essentially to restate the now-commonplace idea of meaning being realised in the moment of reception. Cf. Hans Robert Jauss’s conception of meaning in a text involving “a convergence of the structure of the work and the structure of the interpretation which is ever to be achieved anew”: Segers, 1979-1980, 84. See Jauss, 1982, especially 18-20, 139-148. On the “unique aesthetic character” of a text and our historically-contingent encounter with it, see Martindale, 2006, 9-11, 10; Batstone, 2006.

¹⁷⁴ Martindale, 1993, 7.

¹⁷⁵ See e.g. the essays in Iskin, 2017, and Jones, 2006.

¹⁷⁶ E.g. Meyer, 2013, seeks to redress the historical ‘amnesia’ with which contemporary art is commonly regarded, while nonetheless limiting his scope to the last hundred years.

¹⁷⁷ Nagel, 2012, is an important exception – analysing the relationships between modern and medieval aesthetics. Cf. Nagel and Wood, 2010. Bal, 1999, utilises reception theory in the interpretation of Caravaggio. A key theoretical precursor, addressing the role of the beholder in aesthetic reception, is Kemp, 1998. Immediate precedents for my own approach – in terms of their boldly diachronic scope rather than their specific data sets – include Prettejohn, 2012; Goldhill, 2011; Squire, 2011; Brilliant, 2000a.

perspective of classical reception studies, looking at how art invokes – even when it attacks or subverts – ancient models (whether Ovid’s story of Pygmalion or an artwork such as the *Belvedere Torso*), ancient themes (for example, the dismembered body) and ancient precepts (for example, the ideal of lifelikeness).

The aim, in this, is not simply to use classical art or myth as a metaphor for the processes and effects of contemporary art. We find such a tendency in the 2011 collection of essays *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, written exclusively by contemporary art historians and theorists.¹⁷⁸ The connections drawn by the authors are generally tenuous in the sense that they use classical myths as allegories to be embroidered onto contemporary artworks, rather as Freud used the story of Oedipus to expound his notion of an Oedipus complex.¹⁷⁹ They reveal little or nothing of contemporary art’s shared modalities with classical artistic thought or production. In one sense, this is appropriate to the subject-matter – an affirmation of myths’ flexibility and circuitous transmission (one might point to Ovid’s own love of perversely tenuous links).¹⁸⁰ The editors propose that “myths are stories whose real subjects lie elsewhere, somehow unbound by the minor narrative through which deeper meanings are inevitably conveyed”.¹⁸¹ But ultimately the authors too often arrive at ‘deeper meanings’ that have little to do with classical sources.

There are several respects in which the growing field of classical reception studies provides a useful frame in which to configure the relationship between contemporary art and classical antiquity.¹⁸² First, it challenges what Classics is, or might be.¹⁸³ Secondly, it typically resists the kind of positivist mode of interpretation according to which meaning resides, concretely and immanently, in a given text.¹⁸⁴ In its emphasis on reader (or viewer) response and the construction of meaning in the ‘moment of reception’, it offers a firm basis for my contention that contemporary art, itself open-ended and polysemic, acquires its meaning very often in

¹⁷⁸ Loring Wallace and Hirsh, 2011a.

¹⁷⁹ On Freud’s view of Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* as a ‘proof text’ for his theory, see Merkur, 2005, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Wheeler, 2000, 48-69.

¹⁸¹ Loring Wallace and Hirsh, 2011b, 5.

¹⁸² Cf. Nietzsche, ‘We Philologists’, 1875: “This is the antinomy of philology: *antiquity* has in fact always been understood *from the perspective of the present* – and should the *present* now be understood *from the perspective of antiquity*?” Quoted in Porter, 2000, 15. On reception theory and its applicability to contexts beyond literature, see Pettejohn, 2006; Kennedy, 2006. On the place of classical reception within the broader framework that might be termed the classical tradition, and the differences between the two terms, see Silk *et al*, 2014, especially 4-7; Goldhill, 2011, 1, 10-16; Hardwick and Stray, 2008. See also n. 11.

¹⁸³ On reception studies facilitating an “enlarged sense of what classics might be”, see Martindale, 2006, 3.

¹⁸⁴ Martindale, 1993, 4.

the act of viewing.¹⁸⁵ This Introduction has already shown how the literary critical concepts of intertextuality and allusion furnish a useful model for reconceiving ‘influence’ in western art; and this theorisation of the act of viewing – whereby a work’s meaning need not be subservient to the artist’s intentions – once again draws upon literary theory. As Charles Martindale has proposed: “*Meaning, we could say, is always realized at the point of reception*; if so, we cannot assume that an ‘intention’ is effectively communicated within any text”.¹⁸⁶

The application of classical reception’s methodology to contemporary art will hopefully facilitate a fresh perspective on both classical sources and contemporary ones. That methodology, essentially one of reading the classical from the perspective of the contemporary and vice versa, does not however entail a denial of the cultural specificity of either. So for example, in Chapter 3, the *Belvedere Torso* is not simply defined as proto-Modernist spectacle of fragmentation, nor as an ancient remain whose original context and form are of greater importance than any of the responses it has elicited since it was discovered.¹⁸⁷ Instead, the intention is to steer a path between “merely antiquarian” and “crudely presentist” responses to classical materials.¹⁸⁸

Ultimately, I will endeavour to show that contemporary art does not amount to a rejection of what has come to be termed the classical tradition – even when it strikes an attitude of rejection or indifference – and instead that it alternately challenges and affirms some of the key ideas about art that emerged in classical antiquity and set the agenda in the Renaissance and eighteenth century. Three such ideas (or sets of ideas relating to a particular theme) will be looked at in turn in the chapters that follow.

¹⁸⁵ Cf Kemp, 1998, 188, on the ‘blank’ and ‘indeterminacy’.

¹⁸⁶ Martindale, 1993, Cf. Bal, 1999, 10. 3. See also Batstone, 2006; and on the problems of defining the ‘moment of reception’, Kennedy, 2006. Cf. Goldhill, 2011, 13-14. Prettejohn offers a corrective to Jauss’s view of reception as a cumulative process (where by the “reader’s” understanding of a work is sustained and enriched “in a chain of receptions from generation to generation”), positing instead the concept of “‘chance encounter’, where ‘chance’ does not imply inconsequentiality”. Prettejohn, 2012, 36.

¹⁸⁷ Emblematic of the latter view is Adolf Furtwängler’s statement, in relation to the *Venus de Milo*, that that we ought to “find out, not what the statue ought to have been or how it would answer best to our preconceived notions, but what it actually was.” Furtwängler, 1895. Quoted in Prettejohn, 2006, 249. Cf. Chapter 3, n. 108.

¹⁸⁸ Martindale, 2006, 13.

6. Structure

The first ‘lens’ through which this thesis examines British art’s relationship with classical antiquity is that of realism. This refers not to the nineteenth-century phenomenon of Realism, but rather the relationship between artistic representation and ‘real’ life, as reflected in the practice of mimesis. This practice is central to Greco-Roman art and its early theorisations by authors such as Pliny. Modern and contemporary art has regularly been defined, since the early twentieth century, as reacting against or breaking outside of this mimetic imperative. But this chapter will show that realism – understood as a means of mediating between ‘art’ and ‘life’ – has been a recurring and dominant concern of art of the last thirty years, even for artists who appear to renounce the theory and practice of mimesis. Moreover, those works of contemporary art which seem most defiantly new – dispensing with traditional media and methodologies – ultimately gain their defiance from their continuity with classical principles of realism. Through a re-reading of the story of Pygmalion – a story routinely invoked by art historians as a metaphor for art’s own progression towards mimetic perfection – I argue that contemporary art’s embrace of the ‘real’, as evidenced by Mark Wallinger and Gilbert & George, is one of the principal ways in which it remains linked to the classical tradition.

Taking the fragmented body as its theme, Chapter 3 compares examples of ancient statuary (famed for what is lost as much as what survives) and myths of dismemberment with contemporary artistic representations of ‘the body in pieces’. Focusing on artworks by Marc Quinn and Sarah Lucas, the chapter aims to show that the fragmented body is not simply a lurid theme popular in the ancient and contemporary imaginations, but a ubiquitous condition of artistic transmission throughout history. Through an analysis of the post-classical histories of the *Venus de Milo* and *Belvedere Torso*, and an examination of stories of *sparagmos* in Renaissance art, the chapter demonstrates how artistic responses to the classical have long been – and are perhaps increasingly being – defined by a process of ‘re-membling’, or of imaginative interpolation of the gaps in the extant tradition. In conclusion, the chapter asks whether the fragmented body offers a productive way of thinking about classical reception. Just as the classical world percolates into contemporary art through a dual process of deliberate allusion and indirect (potentially subliminal) instantiation, the classical trope of the broken body survives in a combination of intentional and accidental examples.

The final chapter focuses on the figurative plaster cast, a category of object common to classical antiquity and the art of the present. As with the previous two ‘lenses’, the figurative plaster cast offers a means of showing how contemporary art remains linked, both in form and meaning, to the classical past. Plaster figures in contemporary art are seen to vary dramatically in appearance and import – ranging from direct ‘citation’ of classical statuary to crude and abrasive casts from life. But in their very variety of forms and effects, these examples recall the multiple – often contradictory – identities of plaster casts as they were used throughout the classical artistic tradition. Through an examination of the shifting and multiple functions of the plaster cast in antiquity and since the Renaissance, the chapter shows how the object has become emblematic of the classical artistic tradition *per se*. In so doing, it argues that the various identities of plaster casts in contemporary art – whether as objects of beauty or disposable ‘stand-ins’ – repeat and reaffirm the place of the cast at the heart of the classical tradition.

By the end of this thesis, we will have seen – by means of our ‘lenses’ – how contemporary British art is embedded in the classical artistic tradition. The clichéd challenge “But is it art?” will be answered through a demonstration of contemporary art’s deployment of ancient conceptions of realism, figuration and materiality. The relationship between the classical and the contemporary – or the presence of classical modalities *in* contemporary art – will be clear not only from specific visual correspondences between the two, but also from their shared embodiment and affirmation of *what art is*. As a result, it is hoped that YBA production will be better embraced – and its critics better placed to understand its contribution to Art History. Moreover, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the ongoing intergration of visual culture into reception studies, a field in which art has yet to occupy a central place.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Building on Silk *et al*, 2014; Prettejohn, 2012; Goldhill, 2011; Prettejohn, 2006; Barrow, 2005. While visual art does have a place in e.g. Silk *et al*, 2014, it remains a marginal or secondary point of focus.

Chapter 2: Pygmalion and the Real

1. Introduction

This chapter argues that contemporary art's obsession with the real is one of the principal ways in which it partakes in the classical tradition. The imitation of life in sculpture and painting has become almost synonymous, in Art History, with the tradition of mimetic representation established by Greco-Roman art and early theorisations by authors such as Pliny.¹ By contrast, modern and contemporary art has regularly been defined as reacting against, or breaking outside of, the tradition.² The French 'Realist' movement, for example, of the 1840s was already defining itself against the idealised classicism of academic art.³ But this chapter will show that realism with a small 'r' is still a recurring and dominant concern, even for artists who appear to renounce the theory and practice of mimesis altogether. Those works of contemporary art which seem most defiantly new – dispensing with traditional media, methodologies, and modes such as naturalism – ultimately gain their defiance from their very continuity with classical concepts of art's relationship with life.

In thinking about what realism is, and has been, this chapter will propose that the notion of mimetic 'accuracy' is, and always has been, a red herring – far from the simple and stable phenomenon it is often held to be.⁴ 'Verisimilitude', after all, means only "the *appearance* of being true or real".⁵ Already in Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, the concept of mimesis or 'likeness to life' may be seen to have a gap or distance built into it: the sculptor Lysippus, for example,

¹ Pliny traces the development of mimetic painting (*HN*, 35.1-27 and 35.53-147) and the successive 'inventions' of sculpture (*HN*, 34.15-98 and 36.15-37). Following Pliny, Vasari narrates western Art History as the progressive conquest of appearances. Gombrich, 1960, 99-125, characterises the development of naturalism in ancient art as the 'Greek Revolution'. On Gombrich's use of the Vasarian model, see Danto, 1997, 48-51. On mimesis in antiquity (with reassessments of Gombrich): Squire, 2011, 33-68; Tanner, 2006, 31-96; Elsner, 2006a; Halliwell, 2002; Spivey, 1997; Beard, 1985. Key studies of mimesis and realism in western art include Bann, 1989a; Bryson, 1983; Goodman, 1976; Gombrich, 1960; Jakobson, 1987. The landmark study of mimesis in literature is Auerbach, 1953.

² On avant-garde art's rejection of mimesis, see *inter alia* Gaiger, 2008, 19, 116-143; Danto, 1997, 29-30, 46-57, 64-66; Greenberg, 1965; Greenberg, 1961a, 133-136, 167-168; Gombrich, 1960, 301-305; Greenberg, 1940. On the vanishing distinction, by the 1960s, between 'art' and 'non-art', see Danto, 1998, especially 129-30.

³ On nineteenth-century Realism, see especially Rosen and Zerner, 1984, 131-179; Nochlin, 1971.

⁴ For a standard account of realism in Greek art, see Boardman, 1995, 11-15. Cf. Vernant, 1991, 152, and Stewart, 1990, 73, who argue that the concept of mimesis became standardised, in antiquity, with Plato's definition of art as imitation. For different manifestations of mimesis in Greek sculpture, see *ibid*, 73-85. See however Rouveret, 1989, on a significant parallel dimension to ancient art and its theorization, running back to Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, 3.11 – that of making visible the invisible: *ibid*, 15-24. Cf. Goldhill, 1998, 110-113; Zeitlin, 1994, 192-193. On idealist aims in ancient art, see Section 4, below.

⁵ Brown, 1993, 3564. Italics mine. 'Mimesis' and 'verisimilitude' are understood synonymously.

is said to have claimed that while older statues represented men “as they actually were, his represented them as they *seemed* to be.”⁶ As this chapter will demonstrate, seeming takes many forms, and has done since antiquity. Not all of these are adequately glossed, as modern art historians have tended to do, as ‘illusionism’ (or the convincing simulation of appearances).⁷ Some are far more visceral. This chapter seeks to understand realism as a scale, ranging from idealistic or stylised representation at one end, to close approximation of the ‘real’ (or what might be termed ‘naturalism’ or ‘verism’) at the other.⁸ Across this scale, the distinction between representation and reality is tested, but never eliminated. Realism’s own contradictions and complexities (above all, the capacity for an artwork to be realistic and yet palpably unreal) are recognised and theorised within classical sources, both artistic and literary. In this chapter, we shall see how ‘illusionism’ is an overly delicate and euphemistic concept for understanding those ancient stories in which statues such as the *Aphrodite of Cnidus* are felt to be so real that they are made love to, or indeed become animate.⁹

Once redefined in this way, realism remains central to art-historical discourse, up to the present day. The number of classical and post-classical artworks in which the ‘real’ is what is at stake, is effectively limitless. The purpose of this chapter is not to trace this discourse (for that would be impossible), but rather to show how contemporary art’s uses of the ‘real’ – whether in the form of found objects or living bodies – powerfully evokes the classical topos of artworks so realistic that they become, in effect, real. This topos is most famously explored in antiquity in the various versions of the Pygmalion myth. Seminally recounted by Ovid in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*, this is the story of the master-sculptor from Cyprus who falls in love with his own ivory statue, which is then brought to life by Venus under his touch.¹⁰ This chapter focuses dually on the ancient story as it appears in Ovid, and on a select number of works by leading British artists of the last three decades. The principle case studies will be Gilbert & George’s *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* (first presented in 1969; figs. 25-26), which vividly, if incidentally (as far as their commitment is concerned), reanimates Pygmalion’s statue, and Mark Wallinger’s *A Real Work of Art* (1993; figs. 26-27), a racehorse presented as

⁶ *HN*, 34.65. See n. 117-118.

⁷ On realism and illusionism, see Mitchell, 1994, 325-328. Cf. n. 175, 177.

⁸ In this chapter, ‘naturalism’ describes the mode or style by which artists strive for verisimilitude. On ‘verism’ in Roman art, see Smith, 1981; Fejfer, 2008, 5-6.

⁹ See n. 74.

¹⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.243-297. On the canonicity of Ovid’s version, see Reinhold, 1971, 316. On the ancient topos of realistic artworks becoming (or appearing to become) real, see especially Squire, 2011, 63, 86-88; 98-99; Squire, 2010; Carey, 2003, 105-113; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 128-132; Barkan, 1999, 80-81; Spivey, 1996, 47-53; Spivey, 1995; Kris and Kurz, 1979, 61-90.

an artwork. An ancillary example later in the chapter will be Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child (Divided)* (1993; figs. 12, 37-39).

Why this focus on a classical myth? First, myth in general is an obvious starting point for a discussion of realism in western art. Both in antiquity and later ages, it has been one of the principal genres through which western art has established itself as an art of fidelity to appearances – despite, if not because of, the fact that the subject matter may be fanciful.¹¹ Artists who visualised mythological stories from the Renaissance onwards were frequently striving to reimagine those stories in a believable guise. Secondly, the story of Pygmalion and his statue is revealing because since antiquity, artists and theorists have seen it as a way of thematising the idea of mimetic representation.¹² One of the clearest ways in which contemporary art seems to have dispensed with the classical tradition is in its abandonment of mimetic representation of mythological themes. Yet, as this chapter will show, contemporary art enacts the Pygmalion story even when it makes no claim to illustrate it. Above all, artists continue to work with and through the story's subtle conception of realism.

The Pygmalion myth is but one of numerous classical myths in which the nature of art – or the relationship between art and nature – appears metaphorically embedded. (These include the stories of Narcissus, Medusa, Arachne, and Apollo and Daphne).¹³ It has come to be enshrined, in the western artistic canon, as a triumphant fable of realist art – an allegory of mimetic realism flourishing into reality.¹⁴ But arguably, such a characterisation of the Pygmalion myth is over-optimistic. It glosses over the fact that the myth in its 'original' form

¹¹ See Alberti, 2004, 71-86. On the link between narrative and realism in western art, see Gombrich, 1960, 130-131. For a critique of Gombrich, see Beard, 1985. On the connections and tensions between narrativity and pictorial realism, see Steiner, 1988, especially 21-26. On Alberti's concept of *istoria*, see *ibid.*, 25; Greenstein, 1992, 34-58; Rigolot, 1999, 162; Grayson, 1972, 12-17. On classical myth in western art: Kilinski, 2013; Barolsky, 1998; Bull, 2005.

¹² The Pygmalion story, or its central theme of a statue coming alive, has been used prolifically as a metaphor for the production and reception of art. Vasari lists Pygmalion among the great ancient artists (Vasari, 1987a, 28), and evokes the myth repeatedly, for example in his praise of Leonardo: "Leonardo may be said to have painted figures that moved and breathed." *Ibid.*, 252. Cf. Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* (da Vinci, 1956, no. 33); and Lorenzo Ghiberti's mid-fifteenth-century account of the unearthing of a *Hermaphrodite* in Rome, eroticizing the experience of seeing and touching the statue: Ghiberti, 1947, 55. Quoted in Pardo, 1993, 62. On the "eroticizing of sight" in the sixteenth-century, see Ginzburg, 1997. Modern-day theorisations of the Pygmalion story as a metaphor for art include Barolsky, 1998; Gombrich, 1960, 80-98. Cf. Hardie, 2002, 189-191, 208; Rigolot, 1999, 161; Fränkel, 1945, 96.

¹³ Barolsky, 2014a, 14-21. On Apollo and Daphne, see *ibid.*, 67-77; and on Medusa, *ibid.*, 164-165.

¹⁴ On the story's peak of popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Kilinski, 2013, 143-144; Stoichita, 2008, 161-180; Barrow, 2007, 95, 107; Tompkins, 2015, 74-75; Smith, 1996, 200; Herder, 2002, 103-104; Jenkyns, 1991, 115-142; Freedberg, 1989, 242-243.

dramatises the limitations, even the failures, of realism. Through a close analysis of the story as it appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this chapter argues that the myth harbours a more ambivalent and sceptical conception of realism than has often been supposed by artists and art historians. The reading of Ovid thus provides a frame for reinterpreting realism itself, from antiquity to the present, throughout the remainder of the chapter.

From this starting point, the chapter asks what is meant by 'classical realism' in the first place, and asks whether the conception of realism traced in Ovid's story might be applied more comprehensively to ancient discourse and art. I look at two ancient literary texts – by Plato and Pliny – in which realism was seminally debated and described. I then consider how realism was actually manifested in antiquity, through two different yet equally celebrated works of Greco-Roman sculpture – the first an 'idealised' representation of the human body, the second a more viscerally 'realistic' one. Having shown that realism is a more complex process, in practice, than the ideal of mimetic imitation allows for, I move forward in time to consider how the story of Pygmalion – a myth in which ideas of art versus reality, and the 'ideal' versus the 'real', are played out – has been represented (or misrepresented) in western art.

Only then do we return to the contemporary artworks with which the chapter opens. We do so via an analysis of a work by Damien Hirst – an installation in which the principal themes of the chapter – above all that of realism versus the real – may be seen to play out. In this final part of the chapter, the reading of Ovid's story is applied to the works of Wallinger and Gilbert & George, in which realism is supplanted by the 'real'. Through reference to the metamorphosis of Pygmalion's statue, and the broader inferences which have been drawn from classical and classicizing works of art in the chapter, I argue that – far from dispensing with the classical tradition of realism – these contemporary examples extend that tradition, simultaneously invoking and inverting it.

2. Contemporary case studies: Gilbert & George's *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* and Mark Wallinger's *A Real Work of Art*

George: *Why should we be inspired by some bronze antiquity nonsense that we never saw?*

Gilbert: *In the end, we want to be naked in front of the world.*

Gilbert & George, 2015¹⁵

There are two principal reasons why Gilbert & George offer a compelling test-case. First, they are widely regarded as being among the most ground-breaking, controversial and influential artists of the last thirty years. Through their performances and photographic works, they were instrumental in defining British art in the postmodern era – anticipating the ‘YBA’ generation which came to prominence in the 1990s.¹⁶ Secondly, Gilbert & George have always characterised their work as being indifferent to artistic tradition, perhaps even disconnected from it.¹⁷ This is despite the debts of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* to classical sculptural models – most obviously in the use of bronze face-paint – or of their later multipart *PICTURES* to religious iconography.¹⁸ But in this chapter, I will show that their early performance work *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* derives its very status *as sculpture* by falling within the historical shadow of Pygmalion’s statue. Indeed, this work highlights the conflicted position which these artists occupy, between their own vaunted anti-classicism on the one hand, and their innately classical understanding of art – and art’s limits – on the other.

THE SINGING SCULPTURE brought Gilbert & George to worldwide attention. It was one of a range of ‘performable’ sculptures in which the artists’ daily activities were reconceived as sculptures (it was first staged in 1969 as part of *Our New Sculpture* at the Royal College of Art; fig. 28). In the routine,¹⁹ which has been serially repeated, they posed as expressionless and smart-suited effigies, side-by-side on a raised platform, singing and miming to the Flanagan and Allen music hall tune *Underneath the Arches* (1932). After the first few

¹⁵ Gilbert & George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015.

¹⁶ Button, 1999, 44-48; Stallabrass, 1999, 87-89; Collings, 1997, 36-38, 61-62; Farson, 1991, 31-41; Cork, 1987; Cork, 1971.

¹⁷ See e.g. Jonquet, 2004, 279, 340-341; Rosenblum, 2004, 144; Farson, 1991, 18, 141-142.

¹⁸ On *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, see Ratcliff and Rosenblum, 1993; Ratcliff, 1980, 9-17, 58-65. See also Jonquet, 2004, 65-69; Weintraub *et al.*, 1996, 73-74. On the *PICTURES*, see Gilbert & George and Fuchs, 2007; and on their religious appropriations, Bracewell, 2006; Jonquet, 2004, 154-156; Rosenblum, 2004, 81-86.

¹⁹ They reject the term “performance”, Gilbert explaining: “Our work was a kind of *existence* – an attempt to slow down life, and make ourselves the art. Our whole life became a kind of Living Sculpture. It’s not that we were coming up with a ‘performance’.”

occasions in 1969 (fig. 28), they began coating their faces with metallic greasepaint (fig. 29). The main components of the routine have been succinctly outlined:

As the song plays, Gilbert & George, one holding a stick, the other a glove, rotate with fluid, mechanical movements and gestures, singing along as they turn. At the song's end, whoever is holding the glove steps down and restarts the cassette, then returns to the table. They exchange the stick and the glove, and the song begins again, they begin again.²⁰

Often staged for hours at a time, *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* consisted of the artists turning themselves into a work of art – placing themselves at “the centre of what we do”. For Gilbert & George, it is their art's proximity to ‘real life’ – its near-seamless integration into their wider existence – that separates it from historical (and ultimately classical) traditions.²¹ As students in the late 1960s, they defined themselves in opposition to the dominant trends in British post-war art, in particular the formalist abstraction they encountered at St Martin's School of Art.²²

Gilbert: When we trained as artists, we went through the History of Art. We went to museums and saw all the Madonnas and the Caravaggios. But in the end we made a big decision: that's dead art. It doesn't mean anything. It was propaganda for the church most of the time, and we're not now in that moment. People don't believe in Jesus hanging from the cross. They only like the colours or the breast of the Madonna. [...] We don't want to look at art, we want only to express ourselves – our lives today – as we walk the streets of London, without looking at digested art. That's so important.

[...]

Gilbert: We found meaning in art in a very good way: we made ourselves *speaking artists*. With the idea of the ‘Living Sculptures’, we became the centre of our work, the centre of what we do. At that moment, you become different. You become a kind of preacher. None of our subjects comes from art. They come from *us*, the suffering of living.

²⁰ Ratcliff and Rosenblum, 1993, 9.

²¹ Cf. Farson, 1991, 18: “We believe in truth. We hate so much the baggage of art – Greek columns, do you need it?”

²² “We realised that the formalism didn't speak out of its own narrow elitist circle. If you'd taken the sculpture they were doing at St Martin's onto the Charing Cross Road, nobody would have noticed it.” (George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015).

George: I don't see why people shouldn't be interested in the vomit in the street on Sunday mornings, and the pigeon having breakfast on it, rather than asking about some long-dead French or Swedish artist. That's what we're looking at, *that, that*.

[...]

Gilbert: We were against the formalism of art. We found a way through that, by becoming emotional artists – let's say, a sculpture with all the emotions you can have as a human being.²³

These statements make clear that Gilbert & George regarded artistic precedents as elitist and inaccessible. In contrast to what they perceived as the austere idiom of formalist abstraction, and the stagnant (“dead”) traditions of Art History (“the Madonnas and the Caravaggios”), they resolved to create an art that would be direct, unmediated and alive.²⁴ The classical artistic tradition, according to this view, is antithetical to real life.

And yet while the artists have disclaimed ancient models, *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* reanimated a theme – that of ‘living statues’ – that is inherently classical, instanced most famously by the myth of Pygmalion, and found in numerous other ancient fables of artworks coming to life or (conversely) of real bodies turning into statues.²⁵ The elision of living model and work of art was a prolific theme in antiquity.²⁶ Other ancient parallels are discernible besides. ‘Bronzed up’ in metallic face paint, Gilbert & George were borrowing the lustre of an archetypally classical medium, as if to become Artemision Zeuses in Savile Row suits (figs. 30-31).²⁷ With their robotic, cyclical movements, they were equally playing at being automata of the kind legendarily constructed by Daedalus.²⁸ This chapter asks what it means

²³ Gilbert & George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015.

²⁴ Cf. Rosalind Krauss's concept of sculpture from the 1960s inhabiting an “expanded” field of materials and forms: Krauss, 1979. Cf. Kaprow, 1960. Gilbert & George's dismissal of Art History echoes the rhetoric of nineteenth-century Realism, e.g. Gustave Courbet's 1861 assertion: “An epoch can only be reproduced by its own artists [...] To go backward is to do nothing”. See Nochlin, 1966, 35. On Realism, cf. Nochlin, 1971, 20-40.

²⁵ See n. 12. Myths in which real bodies become statuesque include Apollo and Daphne (Ovid, *Met.*, 1.473-552); Perseus and the Gorgon's head (*Met.*, 5.149-249); and the Propoetides (*Met.*, 10, 220-242).

²⁶ E.g. Pliny's tale of Campaspe: Apelles painted Alexander's mistress, Campaspe; the painting was so convincing that Alexander rewarded Apelles with Campaspe herself. Pliny, *HN*, 35.79-97. Cf. Phryne and the *Aphrodite of Knidos*: see Chapter 1, n. 84.

²⁷ Mattusch, 2002, 104-105; Houser, 1987, 120-144.

²⁸ The legend of Daedalus's animate statues is recorded *inter alia* by Diodorus, *Library*, 4.76, 1-6; Plato, *Meno*, 97D. On Daedalus, see Bettini, 1999, 148; Spivey, 1996, 56-63; Spivey, 1995, 447-454; Sharrock, 1991, 41;

to identify such parallels within *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*. Are they merely incidental? Or do these classical elements – however unintended on the part of the artists – account for the performance’s iconicity and meaning as a work of art?

Beyond the vaudeville routine of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, Gilbert & George made a more definitive equation between life and art. In 1969, they resolved to become “living sculptures twenty-four hours a day, round the clock, forever.”²⁹ And so, when they were invited to the opening of the exhibition ‘Live Inside Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form’ at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1969, the artists (angered at having been excluded from the show’s line-up) painted their faces bronze and stood motionless among the crowd.³⁰ Already they were stepping down from their pedestal, entering the ‘real world’ as “living sculptures”, in a gesture that has come to symbolise their *modus operandi*. The same year, they wrote a manifesto in which they stated as their first ‘law of sculpture’: “Always be smartly dressed, well groomed relaxed friendly polite and in complete control.”³¹

Gilbert & George thereby characterised their very existence in the same way as their early performances – as a work of art that was not realist, in the sense of mimetic, but *real*. Adopting the populist mantra “Art for All”, they have continued to argue that by subsuming life into art, they stand apart from artistic tradition and history.³² And yet, in the same way as *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, the artists’ *modus operandi* could not help but echo classical or classicising precursors. Writing on the prevalent role of etiquette in the duo’s self-presentation, the critic Pierre Saurisse states: “In singularly devising the ‘mould’ of the etiquette that they apply to themselves, [...] they are both the sculptor and the sculpture, Pygmalion and his statue Galatea”.³³ For another thing, the artists’ practice of expounding their ideas in aphorisms or ‘laws of sculpture’ has an ancient antecedent in Polyclitus’s *Canon*, the treatise on proportion which was exemplified in a sculpture of the same name, “from which artists drew the rudiments of art, as from a code”.³⁴ The act of stepping off the plinth is also – ironically – a kind of ‘stepping into’ the classical tradition. It invokes the work

Morris, 1992, especially 215-226; Kris and Kurz, 1979, 66-68. On automata in antiquity, see also Bredekamp, 1995; and in Dada contexts, Biro, 2009, 1-23.

²⁹ Gilbert quoted in Jonquet, 2004, 68.

³⁰ Farson, 1991, 33. ‘Live Inside Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form’, Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March to 27 April, 1969, and The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 28 August to 27 September, 1969.

³¹ Gilbert & George, 1969. Cf. Cork, 1971, 39-42.

³² Ratcliff, 1980, 11, 65-67.

³³ Saurisse, 2013, 113. On the naming of Galatea, see Reinhold, 1971.

³⁴ Pliny, *HN*, 34.55. On Polyclitus’s *Canon*, see Pollitt, 1995. For ancient references: Pollitt, 1990, 75-77.

of Auguste Rodin, who famously took sculpture off its pedestal – and, as we saw in the Introduction, stood self-consciously on the notional threshold between the ‘classical’ and the ‘modern’.³⁵ Above all, the idea of making a sculpture more immediate – more real – by removing the aggrandising ‘furniture’ of the plinth, ties their work into a much longer narrative of progressive realism which was propounded (as the following section will demonstrate) by Pliny the Elder.³⁶

This is clear when we focus on one of the artists’ credo-style statements. In 1971, they proposed that their every movement might be interpreted as a work of art:

Being living sculptures is our life-blood, our destiny, our romance, our disaster, our light and life. As day breaks over us, we rise into our vacuum and the cold morning light filters dustily through the window. We step into the responsibility-suits of our art. We put on our shoes for the coming walk. Our limbs begin to stir and form actions of looseness, as though without gravity they bounce about for the new day.³⁷

As we have seen, it was through this envisioning of ‘real life’ as a kind of sculpture, dismantling the distinction between art and wider existence, that the artists felt their work to be radically new. And yet, in the language of this early manifesto, Gilbert & George unconsciously evoke the Ovidian language of metamorphosis (“Our limbs begin to stir and form actions of looseness”) that will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. Again, it is clear that in the act of renouncing representational norms – of ‘getting away’ from the classical tradition – Gilbert & George were setting their art within a classical frame.

A work which plays more radically with the distinction between art and reality – again evoking the myth of Pygmalion’s statue – is *A Real Work of Art* (1994; figs. 25-26), by the British conceptual artist Mark Wallinger, which earned him a Turner Prize nomination in 1995.³⁸ Chronologically, Wallinger is a generation younger than Gilbert & George, but slightly preceded the ‘YBA’ movement of the 1990s. He may be regarded as combining the

³⁵ E.g. Elsen, 1974, 86; Danto, 2005, 148.

³⁶ On the opposition of *ars* and *natura* in Pliny, see Carey, 2003, 105-111.

³⁷ Gilbert & George, 1971.

³⁸ O’Reilly, 2015, 40-43; Herbert, 2011, 76-83; Button, 1995, n.p. Wallinger won the Turner Prize in 2007.

social realism of the former (their desire to use ‘real life’ as subject matter) with the latter’s embrace of diverse media and styles.³⁹

In *A Real Work of Art*, Wallinger appropriated a body from the world beyond the metropolitan art scene – a racehorse – and claimed it as an artwork. Named *A Real Work of Art*, the horse was entered into races where its name would be piped out by commentators (also unwitting participants in the artist’s scheme). Whereas Gilbert & George’s *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* constituted a deliberate re-presentation of the artists’ bodies as sculptures, and took place in staged scenarios, Wallinger’s project seemingly meshed art and life so as to render them indistinguishable. Certainly, the idea of a living work of art has more in common with Gilbert & George’s concept of ‘Living Sculptures’ than with the self-conscious routine of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*. Yet Wallinger went a step further than Gilbert & George’s recasting of their daily lives as art (“We step into the responsibility-suits of our Art”),⁴⁰ in that the role of the ‘living sculpture’ was transferred onto an unwitting cypher:

JC: If you take the idea of realism as a kind of classical ideal, then you’ve gone as far as it can go, in making something *so* real that it actually *is* real.

MW: I suppose you could go all the way back to Greek tragedy, [which] was a way of facing up to our worst fears. That was almost a way of literalising them, and they’ve become part of the lexicon of psychoanalysis and everything else. In a way, that degree of realism is perhaps true to some kind of sense of classicism itself.

JC: This makes me think of the early piece of yours with the racehorse that you bought, that was going to be a real work of art.

MW: I suppose I was hoping that I could extend the Duchampian notion of literally denoting something as art that could exist outside of any institution. We’ve had any amount of found objects since Duchamp, which have replayed the same dynamic – except that in a funny kind of way they haven’t, given that they’ve just served to underline the power of institutions to confer status on those things. So they become fundamentally quite conservative gestures in the end.

³⁹ On Wallinger, see Herbert, 2011.

⁴⁰ Gilbert & George, 1971.

[...] I suppose, a lot of art or theory, if it's properly dramatic and challenging and meaningful, is a way of giving permission for people to see things or think about things that can only happen in those forms.⁴¹

Wallinger's racehorse pushed the "Duchampian notion" of a "found object" or sculptural readymade to its limits.⁴² It transported that notion outside of any gallery or institution,⁴³ attaching it to an animate being that had none of the static, sculptural qualities of a 'traditional' readymade. *A Real Work of Art* ran just one race in 1993 before she was injured.⁴⁴ Yet the very act set the horse apart from other ('natural') animals: the gesture was founded upon a desire to play with the notion of the 'real', rather than simply dissolve art into life. Specifically, Wallinger maintains that art and its theorisation are ways of allowing people to "see or think about things that can only happen in those forms". In the same way, he suggests, Greek tragedy provides a form for the externalisation or literalisation of "our worst fears".⁴⁵ Most significantly, he contends that even when it is transposed out of a gallery, a work still needs to be understood *as art* in order to be "dramatic and challenging and meaningful".

Does the impact of *A Real Work of Art* rest solely in its extension of Duchamp's theory of the readymade? Or should we regard the work – as Wallinger appears to – as stepping outside of that category into a broader historical frame in which "realism" and "classicism" are live issues? If we consider this piece within the context of Wallinger's career, it becomes clear that it evolved as much out of an interest in painterly *realism*, as from a desire to revive the conceit of the readymade. Before *A Real Work of Art*, Wallinger had depicted racehorses in detailed, life-size paintings such as the four-part *Race, Class, Sex* (1992; fig. 32).⁴⁶ *A Real Work of Art* might be seen as the culmination of these mimetic works, rather than their

⁴¹ Mark Wallinger, interview with James Cahill, 16 November 2016.

⁴² Cf. Chapter 1, n. 2.

⁴³ For a detailed exposition of how subversive gesture (e.g. the readymade) reinforces established institutions, see Wallinger, 1998.

⁴⁴ Wallinger in email to James Cahill, 20 July 2017: "*A Real World of Art* raced in my colours the following year in Germany winning one race (beating *Cicciolina*!) and being placed three times [...] She is now 25 years old. I have to say that I don't think the success or failure of her racing career reflects on the work which I still consider to be one of my most cherished pieces."

⁴⁵ The bibliography on fear, pity and catharsis in tragedy – as theorised in Aristotle's *Poetics* – is vast. See *inter alia* Schiapparelli and Crivelli, 2012; Eagleton, 2003, 153-177.

⁴⁶ O'Reilly, 2015, 28-29; Bonaventura, 1994.

negation: the paintings' meticulous approximation of reality was willed off the wall, fulfilled in the 'actual reality' of the racehorse.

Whereas Gilbert & George regard their use of the 'real' as a mark of absolute modernity – severing their work from Art History – Wallinger acknowledges that he is working within a classical framework. This chapter will consider the implications of his suggestion that the degree of realism in an artwork corresponds, in some way, to its "sense of classicism". It will ask what it means to place contemporary experiments with the 'real' within a longer tradition of realism. It will ultimately argue that the tradition of representational realism is not at odds with the bold co-option of the 'real' by contemporary art, whether that co-option is of found objects or living bodies.

3. *The myth of Pygmalion in Ovid's Metamorphoses*

In the examples surveyed so far, we have seen two different 'versions' of the Pygmalion myth, refracted through contemporary art. Gilbert & George come closest to the myth when they emphasise their own identity as statues (rather than as sculptors). Wallinger meanwhile plays the role of Pygmalion, without doing any sculpting at all, by denoting a living horse as a 'real work of art'. When we attempt to contextualise these artists' 'living artworks' in the history of western art, the comparison with Pygmalion is unavoidable. Since the Renaissance, the myth has been the *locus classicus* for thinking about realism in art – and specifically, realism as a dimension of the classical tradition.⁴⁷ But how accurate is the comparison? In the contemporary examples, there is a sense in which the artwork *inverts* the myth of Pygmalion rather than simply 'replaying' it. Each work redefines a living being as art, as much as it intimates art's own metamorphosis into something real.

This section turns from contemporary art to the ancient myth. We will see how the artworks' apparent inversion (or confusion) of the myth – their mediation between art and life – is closer to Ovid's 'original' version than we might think.⁴⁸ This is because the myth has

⁴⁷ "[T]he very theory of Renaissance art, grounded in the concept of imitation, was often seen or described in terms of a central Ovidian fable, specifically the story of Pygmalion." Barolsky, 1998, 451.

⁴⁸ Ovid's probable source was Philostephanus's *Cypriaca* (third century BC), in which Pygmalion is the king of Cyprus and the statue is of Aphrodite. Versions of the story surviving from antiquity are those of the Christian apologists Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 4.57.3; and Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes*, 6.13-22. Both quote

frequently been employed as an art-historical metaphor, in which any element of mediation is lost: Pygmalion's statue becomes a fantastical ideal of mimetic art.⁴⁹ This view is encapsulated by the following statement by art historian Paul Barolsky: "When Pygmalion's statue comes alive, her vivacity is the embodiment of an ideal to which European artists would later aspire. Already in Ovid's Rome, if we think about it, Pygmalion's art is an *ideal of verisimilitude* that sculptors sought to achieve."⁵⁰ Interpreting the story as a metamorphosis from art into life, this judgment characterises realism in art as a quest for mimetic perfection. Later in the chapter, we shall see how western artists have pursued – but also fallen short of – this ideal of verisimilitude or 'likeness to life', some of them through direct reference to the myth of Pygmalion.

The Pygmalion myth has continued to serve as an allegory of art's progression, both in antiquity and from the Renaissance onwards, towards mimetic perfection.⁵¹ Modern and contemporary artworks rendered in a 'hyperreal' style continue to elicit analogies with the ancient story.⁵² But does Pygmalion's statue undergo the pure transmutation that these interpretations imply? This chapter proposes that traditional art-historical invocations of the story have taken it out of its literary context, turning it into a bald metaphor. By going back to the Latin text, I will argue that the near-ubiquitous synopsis of the Pygmalion myth as a statue undergoing a magical change – from lifelikeness to life – does little justice to the ambiguities in Ovid's account.⁵³ I will propose that the twofold nature of realism (its capacity to *mediate between* artifice and life, rather than simply sublimate the former into the guise of the latter) is the essential subject of the passage. Moreover, the failure of verisimilitude – the fact that it must forever remain an "ideal" – is thematically built into the story.

Philostephanus in relating that Pygmalion made love to the image of Aphrodite. See Elsner, 2007, 120; Miller, 1988, 205-208; Barkan, 1986, 303, n. 52.

⁴⁹ See n. 12.

⁵⁰ Barolsky, 2014a, 20. Italics mine. Cf. Freedberg, 1989, 342; and Hardie, 2002, 208: the story is antiquity's "founding myth of illusionist art."

⁵¹ On Pygmalion as a 'super-realist', see Solodow, 1988, 216-217. For a summary of traditional readings of Ovid's Pygmalion as a myth of the artist (and poet), see Elsner, 2007, 113; Leach, 1974, 150, n. 40. On the myth's theoretical currency in the Renaissance: Rigolot, 1999; Barolsky, 1998. Barkan, 1986, interprets the story in terms of triumphant resolution, "uniting art and nature with a positive sense of human affirmation": *ibid*, 75; cf. Segal, 1972, 491. Those who have seen the story as one of artistic failure include Leach, 1974, especially 123-127; Janan, 1988, 124-126. Cf. Spivey, 1996, 53. For an art-historical perspective which acknowledges the ambiguity of the statue's 'vivacity', both in the myth and its artistic depictions, see Hammerschlag, 2015, 125-126 (in relation to Frederic Leighton); Smith, 2001, 42; Smith, 1996, 200 (in relation to Edward Burne-Jones).

⁵² E.g. Greeves, 2003, 40 (in relation to Ron Mueck); Buchsteiner, 2001, 69, and Varnedoe, 1985, 7-8 (in relation to Duane Hanson). On hyperrealism, see Taylor, 2009.

⁵³ Key analyses of Ovid's text include Barkan, 1986, 75-78; Solodow, 1988, 215-219; Sharrock, 1991; Elsner, 2007.

In what ways does the myth of Pygmalion signal the complexities of realism? Simply in terms of its positioning in Ovid's poem, the story raises the question of how far art is to be believed. The story appears within the catalogue of legends sung by Orpheus – inserted into an internal narrative. This introduces an additional layer of fiction (or dissimulation), refracting Ovid's voice through that of a mythic character.⁵⁴ Later in this chapter, we shall see how Pliny's stories of magical lifelikeness are framed similarly as legends rather than facts. Then there is the tone of authorial scepticism which underlies Ovid's story, running against the superficial appearance of a triumphant and magical apotheosis. This has two important consequences. First, it shows (albeit in the form of a caricature) how realist art requires an equivocal mode of looking, whereby the corporeal subject and the inanimate medium are alternately (or simultaneously) recognised and elided, as if metamorphosing back and forth in the viewer's mind.⁵⁵ More fundamentally, Ovid's ironic undertone encourages the idea that the transformation of art into life is not the triumphant apotheosis it might seem.

How is this tone of scepticism manifested? The opening of the story is striking for its simultaneous emphasis on Pygmalion's artfulness as a sculptor (247 *mira [...] arte*)⁵⁶ and artlessness as a viewer. Significant, too, is his rejection of women in favour of art. Having shunned real women after observing the immoral Propoetides, Pygmalion carves his own maiden from ivory.⁵⁷ Using the suggestive second-person address characteristic of ecphrasis,⁵⁸ Ovid coaxes us to imagine the effigy, through Pygmalion's eyes, as so dazzlingly realistic that it seems on the point of moving: 250 *quam vivere credas [...] si non obstat reverentia, velle moveri* ("you would think she was alive and ready to move, unless modesty had prevented it").⁵⁹ He sets Pygmalion on a par with the prodigious Daedalus, who according to legend caused a statue to move by infusing it with quicksilver: Pygmalion's own dazzling *sprezzatura* means that he is able to conceal his artistry precisely by dint of his

⁵⁴ Hardie, 2002, 188-189. Cf. Leach, 1974, 124: "The most, I think, that can be said for the story is that Orpheus considers it ideal."

⁵⁵ In respect of painting, this mode of looking has been theorised as one of alternation, whereby we cannot see the image and the painted surface in the same moment (Gombrich, 1960, 198), and one of simultaneity, whereby we see the image through (and in tandem with) the medium: Podro, 1998, especially 5-28; Wollheim, 1987, 21, 46-48; Wollheim, 1980, 205-226, especially 224. Cf. Gaiger, 2008, 53-62.

⁵⁶ Ovid's "formulaic adjective of marvel". Anderson, 1972, 496.

⁵⁷ On Pygmalion's turn from *natura* to *ars*, see Barkan, 1986, 75-76.

⁵⁸ On ecphrasis, see Goldhill, 1994; Fowler 1991. On Ovid's "quasi-ekphrastic procedure", see Rosati, 1983, 140. Cf. Elsner, 2007, 123; Hardie, 2002, 174, 180; Wheeler, 1999, 154-155.

⁵⁹ *moveri* "can mean sexual arousal as well as simple movement." James, 2011, 21. Cf. Sharrock, 1991, 172-173, and Elsner, 2007, 124, on the ambiguity between active and passive voices.

artistry (252, *ars adeo latet arte sua*).⁶⁰ But while Daedalus was an archetype of cunning and conjuring, Pygmalion proves helplessly susceptible to his own creation's virtuosic effects. The fact that the ivory figure may have been smaller than life-size (which is left implicit by Ovid) adds to the sustained absurdity of the story.⁶¹ As he touches his statue repeatedly (254 *saepe manus [...] admovet*) and imagines that his caresses are reciprocated (256 *oscula dat reddique putat*), there is a growing sense of the irrationality and immoderation of Pygmalion's response. His fanciful notion that the statue is responding, and may even bruise under his touch – expressed by the emotive tricolon of *putat [...] credit [...] metuit* (257-9: “he thinks”, “he believes”, “he fears”) – is that of a dupe, rather than a lover or viewer with whom we can readily empathise.⁶²

If there is a clear progression in Pygmalion, it is from veneration to ardour.⁶³ The more real (or less statuesque) the statue becomes, the more its aesthetic appeal is accompanied by erotic charge.⁶⁴ This shift is clearest in Pygmalion's extravagant acts of courtship, where reverence is offset by (and ultimately eclipsed by) hubristic lust. His “burning love” for a “counterfeit body” (253 *pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes*) impels him to shower the statue with trinkets – “shells and polished stones, small birds and flowers of a thousand colours” (250-261 *conchas teretesque lapillos / et parvas volucres et flores mille colorum*) – in an echo of the ritual of honouring cult statues with votive offerings.⁶⁵ (In earlier versions of the story, notably that of Philostephanus, it was a statue of Aphrodite – rather than his own handcraft – that Pygmalion loved).⁶⁶ But it is also a comedic travesty of that ritual.⁶⁷ Ovid implies the incongruous appearance of the festooned effigy through the underplayed irony of *cuncta decent* – “everything is befitting”. Pygmalion's pseudo-offerings are a kitsch debasement of the actual offerings he goes on to make in the temple of Venus – at which point he appears,

⁶⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 97D. Cf. Bettini, 1999, 148. See n. 28.

⁶¹ On the statue's scale, see Stoichita, 2008, 10-14.

⁶² Cf. Leach, 1974, 124; Bettini, 1999, 59. On *paideia* and *pepaideumenoi*, see Platt, 2011, 215-252; Tanner, 2006, 246-250; Whitmarsh, 2005, 13-15; Borg, 2004. Pygmalion's buffoonery may account for the subject's unpopularity in the Renaissance: Vasari, 1996, 18. Cf. Stoichita, 2008, 56.

⁶³ On looking and loving, see Platt, 2011, 195-196. Nietzsche, one of the first commentators to recognise the myth's emblematic force, used it to critique Immanuel Kant's exacting discrimination between “disinterested” aesthetic viewing and debased eroticism: Nietzsche, 1886, 365. See Stoichita, 2008, 4.

⁶⁴ Sharrock, 1991, 41-45; Barkan, 1986, 76-77. For a contrary view of Pygmalion as “a pious lover and suppliant”, see Galinsky, 1975, 89.

⁶⁵ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 4.133-4; Pliny, *HN*, 21.8-9. On cult statues, see Platt, 2011, 7; Tanner, 2006, 45-48; Spivey, 1996, 48-51. On Pygmalion's ‘courtship’ as seduction ritual, see Sharrock, 1991, 44; Stoichita, 2008, 14-15. For Leach, the ritual renders the statue a *meretrix*: *ibid.*, 1974, 124.

⁶⁶ Miller, 1988, 205. On the overt eroticism of Philostephanus's *Cypriaca*, see Barkan, 1986, 303, n. 52; Solodow, 1988, 216. See also n. 48.

⁶⁷ On the story's “burlesque” air, see Leach, 1974, 124-125.

inwardly at least, to concede the impossibility of ivory *actually* being flesh: feeling it implausible or hubristic to pray for the statue to be his bride, he asks for a bride *like* his statue (276 *similis mea [...] eburnae*).⁶⁸ Praying for a statue to come to life would be asking to go beyond the gods – breaking divine laws as well as aesthetic ones. Hephaestus, for instance, built “handmaids wrought in gold, with intelligence, speech, and strength *like that* of actual women”;⁶⁹ while Athena devised “constructions *similar to* living creatures” that paraded in the streets of Rhodes.⁷⁰ In each of these cases, the creations retained a trace of artifice. We might compare the god-wrought figure of Pandora: bedecked with jewels and finery, she is the model of *kalon kakon* – confected in appearance and false in nature (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 78: ψεύδεά θ’ αἰμυλίους τε λόγους καὶ ἐπικλοπον ἦθος, “lies and crafty words and a deceitful nature”).⁷¹

What does this presentation of Pygmalion – as credulous, libidinous, and hubristic – ultimately achieve? First, as has been proposed, the opening of the story elucidates the experience of looking at a realist work of art – oscillating between the perceived reality of the statue (*corpus*) and its actual inertia (*ebur*), between Pygmalion’s lust and *pietas*. Pygmalion’s growing inability to see the artwork for what it is – a statue – makes clear, by way of a cautionary tale, that realism is not a straightforward suppression of the medium in favour of verisimilitude or resemblance. Realism instead entails a reinforcement and reassertion of the medium, and (on the part of the viewer) a suspension of disbelief.⁷² As art historian Victor Stoichita has observed: “The coveted statue is a locus for symbolic exchange and the result of a dialectical process where accomplishments of the ‘unreal’ and ‘real’ alternate in a constantly recurring flow.”⁷³ Of course, in Pygmalion’s case that oscillation becomes destabilised. His progression from worshipful wonder to amorous foolishness offers a lurid parody of the distinct – and potentially contradictory – responses that the “dialectical process” of looking might elicit.

⁶⁸ On the ancient associations of ivory with falsehood, see Elsner, 2007, 125-128; Stoichita, 2008, 10; Leach, 1974, 123. On the erotic connotations of *eburneus*, see Sharrock, 1991, 40. On the possibility that Ovid’s Venus is a chryselephantine effigy, see Hardie, 2002, 190.

⁶⁹ Homer, *Iliad*, 18.417ff. Quoted in Bettini, 1999, 148. Italics mine.

⁷⁰ Pindar, *Olympica*, 7.52. Quoted in Bettini, 1999, 148. Italics mine.

⁷¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 60-80; *Theogony* 570-89. On Pandora, see Platt, 2011, 111-113.

⁷² Cf. Elsner, 2007, 124-125; Hardie, 2002, 191; and in relation to cult statues, Platt, 2011, 77-78; Gordon, 1979, 16-17.

⁷³ Stoichita, 2008, 5.

Beyond this, Ovid's presentation of Pygmalion aligns the story with other tales of living (or seemingly living) statues in classical literature; the following section will indeed argue that the myth's implications about realism – and its limits – extend throughout ancient art and art theory. Certain parallels are vivid and direct: as we have seen, Ovid equates Pygmalion with Daedalus in such a way as to aggrandise and ridicule him simultaneously. Then there is Pygmalion's act of laying the statue on a bed and calling it his lover (268 *appellatque ... sociam*), which prefigures the story found in Pliny and Pseudo-Lucian, in which an aristocratic youth from Cnidus steals into the Temple of Aphrodite in order to fondle, kiss, and finally besmirch with an incriminating stain, Praxiteles's statue of the goddess.⁷⁴ This tale has been characterised as an extreme response to Pliny's emphasis on experiencing the sculpture from all angles;⁷⁵ and as with the Pygmalion story, connoisseurship and the trope of realism are caricatured into a picture of deranged lechery.⁷⁶ The intertextual link between Ovid's Pygmalion and the aberrant statue-worshipper of Cnidus underscores the point that Pygmalion's story – far from being a paradigm of artistic genius – constitutes a “myth of prohibition.”⁷⁷ To mistake realism for reality is to wish the impossible – the behaviour of a madman.

Aside from these satirical and erotic parallels, the Pygmalion tale intersects more broadly with ancient accounts of realist art. In particular, it evokes the popular topos of works so realistic that they appeared real.⁷⁸ Pliny's *Historia naturalis* records several fables of deceptively realistic art, including Myron's legendary statue of a cow (the subject of no less than thirty-six Greek epigrams trumpeting its realism), which was so lifelike as to be mistaken for the real thing, with bulls coming to mate with it.⁷⁹ The story of the contest

⁷⁴ Pliny, *HN*, 36.20-21. Cf. Pseudo-Lucian, *Erotes* 13-17. For a landmark analysis of Pseudo-Lucian, see Foucault, 1982, 211-227. Cf. Goldhill, 1995, 102-111. On the story and its variants, see Neer, 2017, 157-164; Platt, 2011, 186-188; Elsner, 2007, 120-121; Vout, 2007, 27-29; Ajootian, 1996, 102; Gross, 1992, 81-82. For a summary of ancient tales of *agalmatophilia*, see Elsner, 2007, 1-2, n. 3; Bettini, 1999, 60-65. On the *Aphrodite of Cnidus*, see *inter alia* Osborne, 1998, 230-235; and on ecphrastic epigrams on Aphrodite, Morales, 2011, 81-91. Platt, 2011, 180-211. On Praxiteles's statue and Ovid's myth, see Havelock, 1995, 130-131; Roos, 2001, 99. George Sandys proposed that Ovid was referring to the Cnidian anecdote: Sandys, 1632, 36. On more recent fictional counterparts, see Gross, 1992, 71.

⁷⁵ Pliny, *HN*, 36.21-23.

⁷⁶ Cf. Bettini, 1999, 59, 66-69; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 113.

⁷⁷ Bettini, 1999, 71.

⁷⁸ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* may be viewed as a model of Kristevan intertextuality: see Chapter 1, n. 49. Cf. Tompkins, 2015, 75; Barolsky, 2010, 35; Sharrock, 1991, 37-38.

⁷⁹ Pliny, *HN*, 34.57-58; *Anthologia Palatina*, 9.713-742. See Squire, 2010; Goldhill, 2007, 15-19. Reflecting the popularity of Pliny's illusionist myths in the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino catalogued the most colourful in *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animae* (1482). See Rigolot, 1999, 162. On the tales' foundational role in Art History, see Dennis, 2004, 245; Barkan, 1999, 89-105.

between Zeuxis and Parrhasius has risen to the same canonical status as that of Pygmalion.⁸⁰ But while echoing such stories, Ovid's tale also perhaps inflects their meaning. The subversive undercurrent of the Pygmalion myth – in which the artist and viewer is a wishful dupe – may be extended to the wider genre, so as to reveal how all such fables are ultimately too good to be true.

Pliny's story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius deserves brief consideration as an example of superb realism that may not be as straightforwardly eulogistic as it appears:

Descendisse hic in certamen cum Zeuxide traditur et, cum ille
detulisset uvas pictas tanto successu, ut in scaenam aves
advolarent, ipse detulisse linteum pictum ita veritate
repraesentata, ut Zeuxis alitum iudicio tumens flagitaret tandem
remote linteo ostendi picturam atque intellecto errore concederet
palmam ingenuo pudore, quoniam ipse volucres fefellisset,
Parrhasius autem se artificem.

Parrhasius entered into a contest with Zeuxis, who produced a
depicted of grapes so skilful that birds flew up to surface.
Parrhasius himself produced a curtain painted with such
naturalism that Zeuxis, swollen with pride at the verdict of the
birds, demanded that the curtain be drawn and the picture
revealed. Realising his error, with candid humility, he yielded
the victory, admitting that while he had deceived the birds,
Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.⁸¹

The often-overlooked paradox of Pliny's stories is that their trope of lifelikeness – of uttermost believability – is unbelievable.⁸² Revealingly, this and similar stories of brilliant realism are cast as fables.⁸³ It is impossible to imagine a *painting* so convincing that it would fool us for more than a few seconds: as philosopher Nelson Goodman has argued, “seeing a picture as a picture precludes mistaking it for anything else [...] In looking at the most realistic picture, I seldom suppose that I can literally reach into the distance, slice the tomato,

⁸⁰ Tanner, 2006, 244-246; Carey, 2003, 109-111; Barkan, 1999, 87-88; Morales, 1996, 184-187; Elsner, 1995, 89-90; Mitchell, 1994, 336-338; Bryson, 1990, 30-33; Bann, 1989a, 27; Bryson, 1983, 1-2; Kris and Kurz, 1979, 62.

⁸¹ Pliny, *HN*, 35.65-6.

⁸² Cf. Nochlin, 1971, 15.

⁸³ Cf. Pliny, *HN*, 35.95; Tanner, 2006, 244. On the anecdotal versus the aesthetic/art-historical components of Pliny's history, see *ibid*, 240; Barkan, 1999, 101; Pollitt, 1974, 63-65. In the case of the epigrams praising Myron's cow, the formulaic genre sustains the element of sceptical playfulness: Squire, 2010.

or beat the drum.”⁸⁴ And the same idea is faintly insinuated by Pliny. For one thing, is the verdict of hungry sparrows so very authoritative?⁸⁵ It is surely safe to assume that even Pygmalion was able to look upon art with more *paideia* than the unwitting arbiters of Zeuxis and Parrhasius’s competition. Pliny moreover observes that Zeuxis, the loser, is *alitur iudicio tumens* at the moment that he demands the removal of the curtain.⁸⁶ The implication is that in a cooler-headed state, Zeuxis would never have been so gullible as to fall into *error* (‘illusion’).⁸⁷ He is not so much fooled by art as blinded by pride.⁸⁸ As we shall see in the following section, which focuses on one of Pliny’s ‘art-historical’ (as opposed to anecdotal) passages, praise of an artwork’s beguiling illusionism is a commonplace of ancient writing about art; but no artwork can eclipse its medium.

Pliny’s supposed *exemplum* of realism concerns painting rather than sculpture, but is akin to Ovid’s story in that it reveals the trope of lifelikeness to be fundamentally rhetorical. The majority of recent scholarship is content to infer that this tale, like that of Pygmalion, furnishes a “myth of illusionist art” or “parable of realism” rather than gently pricking the myth of illusionism.⁸⁹ Certainly, if we compare Pygmalion’s credulity with that of the birds, it might be suggested that his response conforms to the ancient ideal of dazzling realism. As Jaś Elsner has concluded, “Pygmalion’s derangement is itself a symbol of the deception which lies at the heart of realism”.⁹⁰ But as we have seen already, the “deception” wrought by realist art is one in which the viewer is complicit. The obliviousness of Pygmalion’s own derangement – even when viewed as a symbol – ultimately deflates the lofty ideal of lifelikeness.

In its magical culmination, Ovid’s story ceases to be merely a metaphor for the experience of looking at a lifelike artwork. We might say that a story whose subject is the coming to life of an image – the literalising of an artistic conceit – can itself never remain purely metaphorical:

⁸⁴ Goodman, 1976, 35.

⁸⁵ Barkan, 1999, 81. Cf. Tanner, 2006, 245: nature is the superlative judge.

⁸⁶ Bryson, 1990, 32, posits that the entire episode takes place within the framed space of a theatre stage (*in scaenam*).

⁸⁷ *Tumens* has connotations of overweening pride. Cf. Ovid, *Met.* 15.755; Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, 5.6.

⁸⁸ On the transgression of believing in – and loving – an image, see Bettini, 1999, 71.

⁸⁹ E.g. Hardie, 2002, 208; Bryson, 1990, 30. Cf. Giusti, 2009, 15; Tanner, 2006, 245: “the pinnacle of artistic achievement is [...] marked by the perfect adaptation of the world of art to the world-immanent reason of Nature”. Bryson, 1983, perceives the recurrence of an “innocent or Plinian vision” down to Gombrich: *ibid.*, 34. For a corrective, acknowledging the nuances in Pliny, see Mitchell, 1994, 335-336.

⁹⁰ Elsner, 2007, 129.

the myth demands to be taken literally. The scene in which the statue comes to life appears, at first, to be a repetition of the earlier scene of Pygmalion's wishful thinking and touching: "He was astonished and rejoiced, but with doubt, fearing that he was deceived" (287 *Dum stupet et dubie gaudet fallique veretur*). The famous simile of wax softening under the sculptor's touch (285-5) is one that evokes the *formation* of art as much as its dissolution.⁹¹ Then comes the magical revelation of the statue's corporeality – of art's metamorphosis into a responsive, sensate woman: "She felt his kisses and blushed; then meekly lifted her gaze to the light and saw her lover against the sky." (293-4 *Sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina lumen / Attollens pariter cum caelo vidit amantem*).⁹² Ovid breaks from the "virtual reality" of art and ecphrasis (250 *quam vivere credas*) into literal reality, plainly described (289 *Corpus erat*).⁹³ In the metamorphosis from realist artwork to real woman, the story prefigures the contemporary artistic 'turn' to the real perceived in the works of Gilbert & George and Wallinger.

Ovid here asks what it means for realism to be supplanted by reality. Superficially, he implies that such a supplanting is a triumph – the fulfilment of Pygmalion's dream:⁹⁴ "It was a living body; her veins pulsed under the touch of his thumb" (289 *Corpus erat: salient temptatae pollice venae*).⁹⁵ But how satisfying is this outcome? Pygmalion abjured real women in favour of his own imaginative conceit.⁹⁶ The statue's transformation into a living woman is only a triumph, for Pygmalion, in so far as it remains close to his "ivory girl" (275-6 *eburnea virgo ... similis mea*). She is semi-animated – no longer a work of art, yet similar to one – and we might well wonder whether something has been lost in this transformation, both from the creator's point of view and the creation's.⁹⁷ The blushing and bashful woman who replaces the statue seems altogether less impressive than her ivory prototype – "ingeniously passive

⁹¹ James, 2011, 19. On the proximity of Ovid's language of touch and softening to the terminology of sculpture, see Solodow, 1988, 219. Cf. Aristaeus, *Epistulae*, 2.10, for the story of a painter besotted with his painting. Cf. Bettini, 1999, 63; da Vinci, 1956, no. 33. On the erasure of the distinction between image and imaged, see Bettini, 1999, 69; Sharrock, 1991, 46; Kris and Kurz, 1979, 72.

⁹² On the statue's attainment of a gaze, see Bettini, 1999, 147-148.

⁹³ Squire, 2010, 592.

⁹⁴ Cf. Elsner, 2007, 129.

⁹⁵ For Renaissance echoes of Ovid's language, see Vasari, 1987a, 252; Barolsky, 1998, 453-454.

⁹⁶ *Met.* 10.243-244. The idea that Pygmalion has renounced womankind in general (not simply the Propoetides) is strengthened by the parallel with his internal narrator, Orpheus, who rejected women in favour of boys: Sharrock, 1991, 37-38; Bettini, 1999, 69.

⁹⁷ Interpretations of the metamorphosis as anti-climax include Freedberg, 1989, 343; Janan, 1988, 124-125. Compare the exuberant readings of Solodow, 1988, 219; Fränkel, 1945, 93-97. For a critique of the latter: Sharrock, 48, n. 82.

and almost imaginatively docile”, to borrow an epithet from Henry James.⁹⁸ The outcome may delight Pygmalion, but his bride was surely more triumphantly autonomous as a coolly unresponsive marble effigy, than as the compliant girl that she turns into.

In this regard, however, the metamorphosis is only the culmination of a sustained confusion – perceptible throughout the story – between ideal (or synthetic) and real versions of womanhood.⁹⁹ In the following section, we shall see how ancient statues alternate, in a similar fashion, between what might be called naturalism and idealisation. As a statue, Pygmalion’s creation was both a paragon superior to all mortal women (248-249 *qua femina nasci / Nulla potest*, “[a beauty] with which no mortal woman could be born”) and a beguilingly *real* image.¹⁰⁰ Synthetic yet lifelike, Pygmalion’s girl echoes the fabled depiction of Helen of Troy by Zeuxis, for which the painter conflated the most desirable attributes of the five most beautiful girls in Croton.¹⁰¹ As a real woman, she appears little different from her ivory progenitor (her only active movement is a raising of the eyes).¹⁰² Her ultimate function is to bear the sculptor a child from whom the island will take its name – an aetiological fate that renders her akin to those women in the *Metamorphoses* who suffer the reverse experience of turning from humans to statues (for example the Propoetides, supposedly her antithesis).¹⁰³ As the mother of the allegorical ‘Paphos’, she is more a symbol than a sentient character. In other words, she casts off the role of a statue only to attain a statuesque legacy; metamorphosis has merely brought her full circle.

The analysis of Ovid’s text has yielded three important conclusions. First, realism is characterised by a tension – or an interplay – between the real and the artificial. (Ovid’s story parodies, but also elucidates, this interplay in its first twenty-seven lines). Secondly, other

⁹⁸ James, 2003, 456. Cf. Stoichita, 2008, 16; Elsner, 2007, 114; Roos, 2001, 99. Sharrock, 1991, 42, identifies Propertius’s waking Cynthia as a foil for Ovid’s “self-effacing” heroine.

⁹⁹ Conceived by Sharrock as an elegiac construction of woman according to the desires of the poet/artist, or ‘Womanufacture’: *ibid.*, 1991.

¹⁰⁰ The Pygmalion story differs from other fables of lifelikeness in that the statue has no human model: Stoichita, 2008, 3. Cf. James, 2011, 18-20.

¹⁰¹ Cicero, *De inventione* 2.1.1-3; Pliny, *HN*, 35.64. The story is repeated by Alberti, 2004, 91; Bellori, 2005, 58. Cf. Winckelmann, 2013b (1755-56), 38. On Zeuxis’s Helen, see Bull, 2013, 28-29; Platt, 2011, 195, n. 79; Panofsky, 1968, 15-16. On Zeuxis’s “multiple mimesis” as artistic failure, see Barkan, 1999, 85. In a similar conceit, Lucian envisages a perfect representation of woman whose various parts are contributed by different artists (*Imagines*, 6.27). Cf. Richter, 1950, 156-157. Cf. how Socrates imputed the same synthesising methodology to Parrhasius: Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.10. See also Squire, 2010, 606.

¹⁰² As throughout the poem, the metamorphosed subject recalls its untransformed self. See Feldherr, 2002, 169-172; Solodow, 1988, 174.

¹⁰³ *Met.*, 10, 220-242. On aetiology in the *Metamorphoses*, see *inter alia* Graf, 2002, 115-119; Galinsky, 1975, 62, 132;

classical tales of superb lifelikeness might be seen to harbour a more sceptical subtext than is commonly supposed. Ovid's ironic voice helps to reveal the subtler irony at work in those tales. Behind classical authors' rhetoric of all-powerful illusion, there perhaps lies a tacit acknowledgment that realist art relies on an equivocation (in the viewer's mind) between the corporeal referent and the mute medium. Pygmalion's credulous behaviour functions as a parody of the idea that mimetic realism could ever be so convincing as to delude a viewer – offering a riposte to the theory, advanced by Plato in *The Republic* and mythologised prolifically in ancient texts, that we might be taken in by pictorial illusions.¹⁰⁴ The “ideal” of illusionism is precisely that – an unattainable ideal.¹⁰⁵ It cannot be achieved, except through the eclipsing of art itself.

Lastly, the concept of a realist artwork actually transmuting into a living being is shown to have its drawbacks. Post-metamorphosis, Pygmalion's bride remains constructed, model-like and unreal – the blushing and timid recipient of his kisses, and the symbolic ‘mother of Paphos’. She is a living work of art, just as Pymalion had prayed for (275-276 *similis ... mea eburnea virgo*). But in this way, the metamorphosis is anticlimactic: art succeeds in breaking beyond its own threshold and becoming animate, but it fails to throw off the traces of artistry.¹⁰⁶ The living statue is an equivocal body, and therefore in a sense *realist* as much as real, continuing to occupy the threshold between art and life. Significantly, then, the break from realism to the ‘real’ is not a clean one; and I will later argue that this aspect of Ovid's story offers an illuminating way of understanding contemporary art's co-option of ‘real’ bodies.

4. Realism in antiquity: two theories of mimesis and two sculptures

Through the analysis of Ovid, we have seen how the ‘living artworks’ of contemporary art appear to reanimate the classical myth of Pygmalion – for all that they may not allude intentionally to that myth. This is above all in terms of their equivocation between art and reality.

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 602c-d. See n. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Elsner, 2007, especially 124-125.

¹⁰⁶ Goodman, 1976, 33: “That nature imitates art is too timid a dictum. Nature is a product of art and discourse.” Cf. *ibid.*, 39. Cf. Gombrich, 1960, 72-76.

Is the myth of Pygmalion a fantastical anomaly or might it be representative – more broadly – of understandings of mimetic art in antiquity? Already we have seen how the story intersects with other ancient legends of lifelikeness. In this section, I will move from the category of myth to look at art-historical and artistic sources from classical antiquity, arguing that the ambivalent movement between ‘life’ and ‘art’ traced in Ovid’s story has far-reaching implications. Referring to two ancient theories of art and two ancient works of art, I will advance the argument that realism does not simply constitute the imitation – progressively accurate and convincing – of real life. Rather, it is mutable representational language, a mode of depiction which asserts the difference (as much as the proximity) between art and life.

First, I look at two examples of realism as it was theorised in ancient sources. At one level, these literary sources make clear that realism in art has long been synonymous with convincing illusionistic imitation. To this extent, Gilbert & George and Wallinger may be regarded as doing something anti-classical – overturning the age-old principle by replacing illusionism with literal reality. But the excerpts also raise the possibility that realism is a more contradictory concept than it appears – corroborating the conclusions we have drawn from Ovid’s story. This possibility will be all the clearer when we turn to specific examples of Greco-Roman art. Through a comparison of two very different ancient statues, I will demonstrate how realism, as a representational mode, is (and always was) predicated on an oscillation between art and reality, rather than the straightforward approximation of the former to the latter.

In *The Republic*, Plato famously subscribed to the view that artistic images are deceptive – a masquerade of real forms (which are themselves debased versions of ideal, invisible Forms).¹⁰⁷ But if Plato is notoriously disapproving of illusionist art, his misgivings are only the flipside (in the power they impute to art) of the celebrations of brilliantly lifelike artworks that recur throughout the Greco-Roman literary canon, especially from the Hellenistic period onwards. As we saw from the examples of Ovid and Pliny, such celebrations affirm (through their very fancifulness) the fact that an image and its referent are distinct entities, however impressive the illusionism. It was also Plato who provided one of the earliest formulations of

¹⁰⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 595-598, 601-602. Cf. Bettini, 1999, 76. On Plato’s theory of art, see Halliwell, 2002, especially 37-147; Janaway, 1995, 182-203; Lodge, 1953; Gombrich, 1960, 83-84, 107-109.

the idea that an artwork differs, necessarily, from its real-life referent.¹⁰⁸ This appears in the *Cratylus*, a dialogue broadly concerned with language and the idea that linguistic expression should be separated from the idea of the thing expressed:

Σωκράτης

[...] ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐναντίον οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέη πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷόν ἐστιν ὃ εἰκάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκῶν εἶναι. σκόπει δὲ εἰ τί λέγω. ἄρ' ἂν δύο πράγματα εἴη τοιάδε, οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκῶν, εἴ τις θεῶν μὴ μόνον τὸ σὸν χρῶμα καὶ σχῆμα ἀπεικάσειεν ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς πάντα τοιαῦτα ποιήσειεν οἷάπερ τὰ σά, καὶ μαλακότητος καὶ θερμότητος τὰς αὐτὰς ἀποδοίη, καὶ κίνησιν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν οἷαπερ ἡ παρὰ σοὶ ἐνθεΐη αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάντα ἄπερ σὺ ἔχεις, τοιαῦτα ἕτερα καταστήσειεν πλησίον σου; πότερον Κρατύλος ἂν καὶ εἰκῶν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;

Κρατύλος

δύο ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν, ὦ Σώκρατες, Κρατύλοι.

Σωκράτης

ὁρᾷς οὖν, ὦ φίλε, ὅτι ἄλλην χρὴ εἰκόνας ὀρθότητα ζητεῖν καὶ ὧν νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἀναγκάζειν, ἐάν τι ἀπὴ ἢ προσῇ, μηκέτι αὐτὴν εἰκόνα εἶναι; ἢ οὐκ αἰσθάνῃ ὅσου ἐνδέουσιν αἱ εἰκόνες τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἐκείνοις ὧν εἰκόνες εἰσίν;

Socrates: [...] I should say rather that the image, if expressing in every point the entire reality, would no longer be an image. Let us suppose the existence of two objects: one of them shall be Cratylus, and the other the image of Cratylus; and we will suppose, further, that some God makes not only a representation such as a painter would make of your outward form and colour, but also creates an inward organisation like yours, having the same warmth and softness; and into this infuses motion, and soul, and mind, such as you have, and in a word copies all your qualities, and places them by you in another form; would you say that this was Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, or that there were two Cratyluses?

Cratylus. I should say that there were two Cratyluses.

Soc. Then you see, my friend, that we must find some other principle of truth in images, and also in names; and not insist that an image is no longer an image when something is added or subtracted. Do you not perceive that images are very far from

¹⁰⁸ On mimesis as a fluctuating concept in Plato, see Halliwell, 2002, 38-39.

having qualities which are the exact counterpart of the realities which they represent?¹⁰⁹

According to Socrates, in this foundational description of realist art, if a god were to make a person identical to Cratylus – with the same features, body, organs, soul, and mind – then it would be possible to say that there were two Cratyluses. But if an artist merely constructs a picture of Cratylus, then we have an image which is discernibly and necessarily different: “images are very far from having qualities which are the exact counterpart of the realities that they represent”.¹¹⁰ For Plato, then, the artistic medium necessarily intercedes between a representation and its subject. His dialogue suggests, moreover, that an image may pass through varying degrees of realism (something may be “added or subtracted” to it in the interests of “correctness”, *orthotēs*) while remaining ontologically separate from the real world.¹¹¹

The idea expressed in the *Cratylus* dialogue of painting as a replication of “outward form and colour” – that is, an imitation of appearances – came to underpin Renaissance theories of realistic depiction, notably Leon Battista Alberti’s theorisation of linear perspective in his 1435 treatise, *De pictura* (*‘On Painting’*).¹¹² Western Art History up to the twentieth century has continued to subscribe to the fundamental understanding of realism as “any artistic trend which aims at conveying reality as closely as possible and strives for maximum verisimilitude”.¹¹³ Artists have repeatedly been presented as striving to narrow the gap between the representation and its real-life referent, as if their end-goal were the kind of

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 432b-d. Trans. Benjamin Jowett: Plato, 1961, 466. See especially Sedley, 2003; Halliwell, 2002, 43-48; Baxter, 1992; Danto, 1981, 71; Gombrich, 1960, 305-306. Cf. Gaiger, 20-21, 27-32.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b: ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὀρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἡκριβωμένους χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες (“the sight of certain things gives us pain, but we enjoy looking at the most exact imitations of them”). Cf. Danto, 1981, 13-14. On Aristotle’s equation of dramatic mimesis with the illusionism of scene painting, see Elsner, 2006a, 88.

¹¹¹ Halliwell, 2002, 46. Cf. Jakobson, 1987, 21: “It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to ‘see’ a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is said without knowing the language.” On the “distinct thresholds towards and away from the real” in Plato’s theory of art, see Bryson, 1990, 32. Cf. *Cratylus*, 430a-d: mimetic likeness is not restricted to the copying of real-life models. In *The Sophist*, 236c, Plato distinguishes between the art of the “copy” (εἰκαστική) and the art of the “fantasy” or simulacrum (φανταστική). Cf. *ibid*, 240a-c: an artistic image combines the ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ perplexingly.

¹¹² Alberti, 2004, especially 37-59. See Gaiger, 2008, 21-27. On Alberti’s theory of perspective and its limitations, see Gaiger, 2008; Baxandall, 1988, 125-126; Bryson, 1983, 102-112. On Alberti’s doctrine of *convenienza* or *concinnitas* (‘harmony’), see Baxandall, 1988, 135; Panofsky, 1960, 26-27. Cf. Puttfarcken, 2000, 54.

¹¹³ Jakobson, 1987, 20.

apotheosis achieved by Pygmalion's statue.¹¹⁴ And yet, as Ovid's story suggested – and as the *Cratylus* dialogue asserts – that gap cannot be closed. Even “maximum verisimilitude” is separate from reality.¹¹⁵

This may be seen again from the example of Pliny the Elder, whose encyclopaedic *Historia naturalis* is frequently viewed as one of the first attempts to write a history of art.¹¹⁶ As part of a catalogue of artists who have striven to increase illusion,¹¹⁷ Pliny describes the fifth-century Greek sculptor Myron as: *primus hic multiplicasse veritatem videtur, numerosior in arte quam Polyclitus et in symmetria diligentior, et ipse tamen corporum tenuis curiosus animi sensus non expressisse* (“He was apparently the first [artist] to extend the representation of reality, a more talented artist than Polyclitus, and more attentive to symmetry. And yet, however sensitive to the representation of bodies, he failed to capture a sense of inner animation.”)¹¹⁸ From the point of view of this chapter, it is revealing that Pliny's description praises – but also qualifies – Myron's talent for lifelikeness.

What can we deduce from this qualified praise? The main implication of Pliny's summary of Myron's career (and of the other descriptions surrounding it) is that in driving towards greater realism than his forebears, extending the “representation of reality”, the artist rose in stature and advanced the cause of art.¹¹⁹ In this, we find a foundational example of the view – prevalent throughout histories of classical and western art – that art has evolved in a teleological course towards ever greater realism.¹²⁰ (This assumption, as we have seen, finds

¹¹⁴ Gombrich conceived the process as one of “making and matching”: *ibid*, 1960, especially 24, 62–63, 100, 157–160. Cf. Podro, 1998, 6; Jakobson, 1987, 21. On the moment of difference that defines mimesis, see Isjeeling, 1997, 16–21. Cf. Wollheim's theory of twofoldness – whereby the difference between the painted image and material surface is apprehended in the moment of viewing: Wollheim, 1980, 213. Wollheim would go on to concede that *trompe l'oeil* paintings are “non-representational” in the sense that they conceal their medium too well (compare Ovid's *ars adeo latet arte sua*, *Met.* 10.252): Wollheim, 1987, 62. For a rebuttal, see Gaiger, 2008, 60–61.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Baxter, 1992, 168, for whom the mimetic image hypothesised by Socrates/Plato aims at “the maximum amount of verisimilitude”.

¹¹⁶ On Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, see Carey, 2003; Tanner, 2006, 235–246; Isager, 1991.

¹¹⁷ *HN*, 34.49–89. Isager, 1991, 97–107.

¹¹⁸ *HN* 34.57–58. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 2.13.10, in reference to Myron's *Discobolus*: *quid tam distortum et elaboratum quam est ille discobolos Myronis? [...] in qua vel praecipue laudabilis est ipse illa novitas ac difficultas* (“Where can we find a more violent and elaborate attitude than that of the *Discobolus* of Myron? [...] in which the very novelty and difficulty of execution is particularly praiseworthy”). Cf. Gombrich, 1960, 120.

¹¹⁹ On the Plinian conception of reality “as a transcendent and immutable given”, see Bryson, 1983, 5–6. Cf. Barkan, 1999, 84–87.

¹²⁰ On Pliny's influence on Art History from the Renaissance: Tanner, 2006, 243–244; Barkan, 1999, 90–105; Isager, 1991, 9–10; Gombrich, 1966, 1–10, 144 (cf. Gombrich, 1960, 9, 12, 279). Elsner, 2006a, argues that the concept of the ‘Greek Revolution’ is indebted to Renaissance histories of art: *ibid*, 69–70.

its literary corollaries in stories of art magically coming alive). Parallels in later Art History are numerous; Vasari's praise of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, for example, appears to deny the artistic medium altogether: "The nose was finely painted, with rosy and delicate nostrils as in life. The mouth, joined to the flesh-tints of the face by the red of the lips, appeared to be living flesh rather than paint."¹²¹ In Pliny's chronology, therefore, we perhaps find the ancient antecedent of those who view the Pygmalion myth as an "ideal" of realist art.

Yet as we saw from Ovid's text – and in particular, from ancient stories such as that of Zeuxis and Parhassius – the formula of art merging with life is ultimately a device for praising an artist's skill, rather than a genuine claim of artistry's disappearance. Vasari's wishful ecphrastic phrasing ("On looking closely [...] one could swear", analogous to Pliny's *videtur*, or Ovid's *quam vivere credas*) – indeed reinforces our awareness that he is describing an artwork: such language would never have to be applied to the description of an actual woman.¹²²

To return to the passage from Pliny, which might be seen as Vasari's ancient precursor, it is revealing that Myron only succeeds so far. The illusionism of his work, achieved through attention to "symmetry",¹²³ is checked by his work's unmistakeable *illusoriness*. Myron is unable to capture the "inner animation" that goes beyond external appearances (i.e. the liveliness that belongs to real bodies rather than sculpted ones).¹²⁴ On one level, this is merely a statement of Myron's own technical limitations: Pliny goes on to praise Pythagoras of Rhegium as *primus nervos et venas expressit capillumque diligentius* ("the first sculptor who successfully captured the sinews and veins and hair").¹²⁵ But in the broader context of Pliny's catalogue of the great Greek sculptors, the statement may also be read as an acknowledgment of the limits of realism. How far, Pliny implicitly asks throughout his chronology, can mimesis be pushed?¹²⁶ As we have seen in relation to the Pygmalion myth, those moments at which Pliny seems to entertain the idea of realist art merging beguilingly with reality

¹²¹ Vasari, 1987a, 266. Cf. Barolsky, 1991, 64-65.

¹²² Danto, 1981, 158-159. Cf. Barkan, 1999, 85-86. On ecphrasis in Art History: Elsner, 2010.

¹²³ On *symmetria* and its associations with Polyclitus's *Canon*, see Barkan, 1999, 88-89, 254-255; Wolf, 2000, 178-179; and Pollitt, 1974, 14-22, 256-258. Cf. Alberti's linking of realism to perspective by way of optics (ibid, 2004, 37-59, 65-71), and his concept of Nature ordered into a "composition" (ibid, 71-81, 89-91). Cf. Grayson, 1972, 12-17.

¹²⁴ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 88: *symmetria* works *against* inner animation. On ontological debates in antiquity about images, see Squire, 2010, 606 and n. 79. On 'ensouled' statues, see ibid; Spivey, 1996, 49.

¹²⁵ Pliny, *HN*, 34.59.

¹²⁶ See Gombrich, 1960, 123, on Pliny's ending of his chronology with Lysippus. Cf. Tanner, 2006, 242-243.

invariably occur in the context of myths. The notion that art could actually be so realistic as to walk off its plinth remains the stuff of fable.¹²⁷

In summary, Pliny's description of Myron highlights three points which will be useful in showing how Gilbert & George and Wallinger's artworks relate to the tradition of classical realism. First, realism was a prized ideal of classical art, to be discerned in the works of the great Greek sculptors: works of art were compared according to their measure of realism (the more lifelike, the better). Secondly, realism was itself a mutable concept – so much is indicated by Pliny's assertion that Myron “extended the representation of reality” (*multiplicasse veritatem*).¹²⁸ Thirdly, it is suggested that realism, however superlative, has its limits. The traditional interpretation of Pliny's history – whereby art moves inexorably towards the goal of perfect replication – overlooks the extent to which Pliny tacitly acknowledges the ‘ism’ implicit in ‘realism’.¹²⁹ Realism in art will perhaps always fail to ‘measure up’ to the truth of things; or as Plato says, it subscribes to its own “principle of truth”.¹³⁰

Both Plato's *Cratylus* dialogue and the extract from Pliny seem to offer a clear definition of realism – as the imitation of “outward form and colour”, and as a step-by-step narrowing (throughout the history of art) of the threshold between art and reality.¹³¹ By effacing the simple demarcation between image and referent, works such as Gilbert & George's *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* (and the underlying concept of “living sculptures”) and Wallinger's *A Real Work of Art* have seemingly produced a new kind of art, one that is arguably “ridiculous” (γελοῖα – the term which Plato's Socrates goes on to use). Gilbert & George have ‘played god’ in the sense implied by Plato, creating “two Cratyluses” by making their actual bodies (composed of their own physiques, organs, souls and minds) into artworks. Realism is replaced by reality.

¹²⁷ Pliny proceeds to relate an anecdote that warns what will happen when realism is too convincing: *non quivit temperare sibi in eo, quamquam imperiosus sui inter initia principatus, transtulitque in cubiculum alio signo substitute* (“Tiberius could not restrain himself in this case and removed [the *Apoxymenos*] to his bedroom, substituting a copy.”) *HN*, 34.61-65.

¹²⁸ On the ambiguity of this, see Barkan, 1999, 84-86.

¹²⁹ E.g. Bryson, 1983, 6. Cf. Barkan, 1999, for whom Pliny's estimation of value rests on “artistry” rather than “mimesis”: *ibid*, 86. On the limitations of the medium: Gombrich, 1960, 30-34, 82-83, 176-177, 313-314; Stewart, 1990, 83-85.

¹³⁰ Cf. Rigolot, 1999, 161.

¹³¹ I.e. ‘ontogenetic’ and ‘phylogenetic’ definitions. See Donohue, 2005, 30.

But behind their seemingly clear-cut definitions, Plato and Pliny also suggest that realism was a live and shifting concept in antiquity – a way of rationalising the relationship between art and reality, rather than a stable and universally-recognised ideal.¹³² I will now expand upon this idea through reference to two examples of Greco-Roman art. In these, the theories of Plato and Pliny can be seen to be played out, or problematised. The first is generally regarded as an ‘idealised’ depiction of the body, the second as more ‘modern’ in its corporeal realism.¹³³ The *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 6) has its origins in the cusp between late Classical and Hellenistic art (albeit that it is a Roman version of an earlier prototype); by contrast, the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* (fig. 33) belongs squarely in the genre of Hellenistic art, and to a period which has been historicised as a giving rise to newly ‘realist’ works of art.¹³⁴ And yet significantly, each work has been conceptualised in terms of a Pygmalion-style transmutation from art into life (with the *Apollo* being linked directly to the myth). Through these examples, I will argue that, in practice, realism was (and is) far from being a clear-cut phenomenon – neither a straightforward question of resemblance, nor a progressive narrowing of the threshold between art and reality.

The idea that realism is a relative, rather than absolute, quantity is clear from the example of the *Apollo Belvedere*.¹³⁵ This larger-than-life marble figure, discovered in the late fifteenth century, was established as one of great works of the classical world following its placement in the Cortile del Belvedere at the Vatican by 1511. It retained a pre-eminent status well into the nineteenth century, long after it had been re-evaluated as a Roman version a lost sculpture (supposedly by the Greek Leochares).¹³⁶ Was the statue’s celebrity simply a reflection of its ability to imitate the male body with the accuracy that Pliny and others had prized? In post-classical contexts, at least, the work has been venerated both for its mimetic virtuosity and for its expression of a transcendent (i.e. more than real) beauty; indeed, it has been held up as a paradigm of beauty in explicit counterpoint to the lowly realism of Gilbert & George.¹³⁷ In

¹³² On realism and reality as relative concepts: Halliwell, 2002, 47; Goodman, 1976, 36-37; Squire, 2010, 592.

¹³³ On ancient theories of art as imitation versus art as imaginative invention, see especially Panofsky, 1968, 11-32.

¹³⁴ On the periodisation of Greco-Roman art, see especially Boardman, 1993. Cf. Gazda, 2002, 1-8. On the Hellenistic period: Spivey, 1997, 320-378; Smith, 1993. On Hellenistic realism: Pollitt, 1986, 141-147; Zanker, 2004, 153, who describes the *Suicidal Gaul* group in terms that imply a Pygmalion-style coming alive of the image.

¹³⁵ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 8, 148-151.

¹³⁶ Furtwängler, 1895, 409; Mattusch, 2002, 101; Perry, 2005, 1-6. Cf. Porter, 2006, 7 and n. 20.

¹³⁷ “Ever since the Renaissance the Apollo Belvedere has been the West’s ideal of male beauty. Look at the scrawny, pot-bellied kids in Gilbert & George. Hardly heroic specimens.” Richard Dormont, quoted in Farson, 1991, 74.

common with much of the ancient sculpture unearthed in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *Apollo Belvedere*'s realism came to be perceived as being bound up (somewhat paradoxically) with an idealising mode of representation.¹³⁸ Compare Pygmalion's statue: it is a superbly realistic representation (250 *Virginis est verae facies*, "her face was that of a real girl") that is also a perfection of nature (248 *qua femina nasci nulla potest*).¹³⁹

A general expression of this idea may be found in the writings of the German Romantic, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Referring to the ancient sculptor Myron in his 1818 essay 'Myron's Cow', Goethe extols the romantic "naïveté of the concept" whereby the "high-minded artist [...] knew how to perceive the essence of nature and to express it".¹⁴⁰ Goethe's privileging of "naïveté" may seem to suggest a preference for a guileless and authentic representation. But condensation of nature into an "essence" inevitably gives rise to formulaic and stylised works of art, in which artfulness is never quite invisible. Goethe goes on to insist: "it would be unforgivable if we maintained even for one moment that the high-minded artist Myron, the successor of Pheidias and the predecessor of Praxiteles, lacked artistic insight and grace of expression".¹⁴¹ (In an attempt to rationalise the tension between realism and idealism in classical statuary, Goethe conceived of two distinct levels of naturalism – nature 'in the raw' versus noble nature.)¹⁴²

For a more precise application of this idea of 'nature refined into an essence' to the *Apollo Belvedere*, we may turn to the description of the statue by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the eighteenth-century scholar who is often regarded as the founder of the modern discipline of Art History.¹⁴³ Anticipating Goethe, Winckelmann suggested that the idealised appearance of the *Apollo* grants access to a higher imaginative and spiritual reality: "No veins or sinews heat and move this body, but rather a heavenly spirit that, flowing like a gentle stream, has saturated, as it were, every contour of this figure. [...] In gazing upon this masterpiece of art,

¹³⁸ See e.g. the praise of Friedrich Schiller ("this celestial mixture of accessibility and severity"), quoted in Haskell and Penny, 1981, 148.

¹³⁹ Cf. Bettini, 1999, 69.

¹⁴⁰ Goethe, 1986, 24, 29. Quoted in Squire, 2010, 590. For a Modernist reformulation, see Hulme, 1907, reprinted in Csengeri, 1994, 23-45, 42: "Art creates beauty (not art copies the beauty in nature: beauty does not exist by itself in nature, waiting to be copied, only organised pieces of cinders)." Cf. the structuralist readings of Goodman, 1976: see n. 106.

¹⁴¹ Goethe, 1986, 29. Cf. Alberti, 1972, 90; Bellori, 2005, 57-82; and Joshua Reynolds's comparison between the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Discobolus*, "both equally true to nature": Reynolds, 1842, 173. On variations upon this idea in art academies, see Goldstein, 1996, 140-151.

¹⁴² Goethe, 1986, 81-82. See Nisbet, 2002, 230; Allert, 2002, 203-204; Panofsky, 1955b, 266.

¹⁴³ See Chapter 1, n. 39.

I forget all else, and I myself adopt an elevated stance, in order to be worthy of gazing upon it. My chest seems to expand with veneration and to heave like those I have seen swollen as if by the spirit of prophecy, and I feel transported to Delos and to the Lycian groves, places Apollo honored with his presence – for my figure seems to take on life and movement, like Pygmalion’s beauty.”¹⁴⁴

Winckelmann’s ecphrasis has been significant in perpetuating the idea that the *Apollo Belvedere*, through its “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”, connotes a higher truth (“places which Apollo honoured with is presence”) – analogous to the realm of ideal forms imagined by Plato.¹⁴⁵ Yet it is also clear that, for Winckelmann, the statue’s numinous and transcendental effect, which is achieved through a *lack* of anatomical detailing,¹⁴⁶ is concurrent with a lively verisimilitude verging on the erotic: “my figure seems to take on life and movement, like Pygmalion’s beauty.”¹⁴⁷ Winckelmann implies that the statue’s illusionistic power (its capacity to ‘come alive’ before him) gives rise to a commensurate feeling of his own inward animation: he, too, becomes like Pygmalion’s statue. As Elizabeth Prettejohn notes: “The aesthetic encounter as Winckelmann imagines it is reciprocal, making the marble statue seem to come alive at the same time as it increases the viewer’s sense of vitality.”¹⁴⁸ Winckelmann’s choice of Pygmalion as a metaphor for this ‘way of seeing’ is especially apt. It is just this concurrence (or interflow) of effects that the Ovidian myth encapsulates – between the statue’s illusionistic virtuosity and the viewer’s subjective sensations; and more broadly, between idealised and naturalistic modes of representation.¹⁴⁹ The interpretations of both Goethe and Winckelmann belong squarely to their ‘long eighteenth century’ era; but it is also clear that the *Apollo Belvedere*, partly by virtue of

¹⁴⁴ Winckelmann, 2006 (1764), 333-334. See Barolsky, 2014b; Squire, 2009, 47-48; Prettejohn, 2005, 27-29; Brilliant, 2000b, 271; Potts, 1994, 118-132; Webb, 1982, 112-115. For a negative appraisal: Clark, 1956, 51-52. On Winckelmann and Goethe: Potts, 2006, 29-31.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Winckelmann, 2013b (1755-1756), 32, 37-39. This idea spread, via Neo-Platonist philosophy, into art theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Gaiger, 2008, 34; Squire, 2009, 45-49; Stoichita, 2008, 81-82; Gombrich, 1960, 133.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Winckelmann, 2013b (1755-1756), 36-37. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argued that to have imparted a gaping mouth to the *Laocoön* would have been to “twist and distort” his face in an “unnatural and loathsome manner.” Lessing, 1766 (1962), 17. See Harrison *et al*, 2001, 423. Cf. Richter, 1992, 38-89, especially 45-48; 70-73.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Beard and Henderson, 2001, 113.

¹⁴⁸ Prettejohn, 2005, 29.

¹⁴⁹ The relationship between idealisation and naturalism in art has been prolifically theorised. In the seventeenth century, Roger de Piles seminally articulated the distinction in relation to painting: Harrison *et al*, 2001, 308-313; Freedberg, 1989, 437; Puttfarken, 1985. On the Renaissance and later contexts, see Gaiger, 2008, 21-27; Settis, 2006, 42; Panofsky, 1960, 26-28; Gombrich, 1960, 19-20, 266-267.

depicting an anthropomorphised god, derives its effects from a careful balance between corporeal truth and idealisation (“noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”).¹⁵⁰

My second example, the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman*, is a statue which epitomises Hellenistic Realism – and thereby seems to embody an understanding of realism closer to that of modern times.¹⁵¹ In place of the refined finish and poised stance of the *Apollo Belvedere*, this statue presents a hunched figure sculpted from black marble, whose ‘blood vessels and sinews’ (those visceral details which Winckelmann approvingly noted as missing from the *Apollo*) are clearly visible. If the *Apollo Belvedere* presents an image of heroic nudity, the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* constitutes a scene of pathetic *nakedness* – the figure is “naked before the world”, to borrow the words of Gilbert & George.¹⁵² The statue’s life-size proportions, textured surface and reflective medium further enhance its credibility: it evokes a sweat-drenched or water-streaked body. In this way, the statue lends weight to the idea that “The weakening of idealism”, as the classical art historian J.J. Pollitt has argued – in terms which pointedly offset Goethe’s – “naturally leads to an interest in the variety of experience rather than the essence of it.”¹⁵³

But although it has none of the stylised elegance of the *Apollo Belvedere*, the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* is not a work of unalloyed verisimilitude. By evoking the “variety of experience”, it has also inspired divergent interpretations ranging from the fanciful to the humdrum. After its discovery in the Renaissance, the statue was believed to depict the suicide of Seneca and was restored accordingly.¹⁵⁴ This identification endowed the naturalistic figure with an exemplary (even idealistic) quality of heroism and pathos. The introduction of an unhollowed vase of *africano* marble – which was intended to resemble a pool of water collecting Seneca’s blood – further enhanced the overtones of virtue, transforming an image of mundane old age into a memorial (Haskell and Penny compare it to “the attribute of a Christian martyr”).¹⁵⁵ The very marble out of which the body has been hewn is arguably an aggrandising medium – it confers the dignity of carved stone (if not quite the nobility and grandeur seen in the *Apollo*) on the subject of a beggarly old man.

¹⁵⁰ On anthropomorphism in Greek art, see Spivey 1996, 43-53.

¹⁵¹ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 76, 159-161. Cf. Beard and Henderson, 2001, 1-3.

¹⁵² On nakedness versus nudity, see Clark, 1956, 1-25.

¹⁵³ Pollitt, 1986, 141.

¹⁵⁴ Haskell and Penny, 1981, 159; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 1-2, and 282, no. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Haskell and Penny, 1981, 159.

When the statue was reinterpreted as a slave or fisherman, it transformed from a piece of ‘ideal sculpture’ – or high art – into an image of real life.¹⁵⁶ And yet, as with Pygmalion’s statue, the transformation was not absolute. The statue has often clung onto the name – and some of the reflected cachet – of the Stoic philosopher. In addition, the mundane subject matter continued to be counterbalanced by the beauty of its medium and the marble vase.¹⁵⁷ Even this more individualised – recognisably realistic – work of art may be seen to harbour its own combination of verisimilitude and stylisation. In a different way from the *Apollo Belvedere*, the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* compresses together different levels of realism.

At first glance, therefore, the *Apollo Belvedere* and ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* seem to embody a contrast between idealised and veristic (or what might be called naturalistic) modes of figuration. The two works reflect the theoretical divide – present throughout ancient descriptions of art – between art which improves on and supersedes nature,¹⁵⁸ and art which pretends to be nature (and may therefore be regarded as suspect and deceptive): the dichotomy may be simplified to idealism versus naturalism.¹⁵⁹ But are the terms so clear-cut? In the *Apollo Belvedere*, the human body appears sublimated into a ‘dramatic’ or ‘beautiful’ form – or what Pollitt has termed “the intercession of some notion of an ideal or perfect form”.¹⁶⁰ Yet through its very idealisation, the *Apollo* has also been regarded as achieving a pure kind of *realism*. Indeed, it was argued by eighteenth-century critics that an artwork must avoid being too banally imitative of reality if it is to succeed in capturing spiritual truth and beauty.¹⁶¹ The ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* meanwhile aims at a non-sublimated mode of realism, one that comes closer to material reality. Yet here, too, the medium of the work – together with its fanciful, subjective restorations – intercedes to imbue it with a subtler kind

¹⁵⁶ Winckelmann, 1767, vol. 2, 256; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 161; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 2-3. On Roman ideal sculpture: Marvin 2008, 218-247.

¹⁵⁷ The vase was restored in the late 1990s: Beard and Henderson, 2001, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1461b: “a convincing impossibility is preferable to something unconvincing, however possible; again it is perhaps impossible for people to be as beautiful as Zeuxis painted them, but it is better so, as the ideal should surpass reality.” Quoted in Sharrock, 1991, 38.

¹⁵⁹ Sharrock, 1991, 38. Cf. Panofsky, 1968, 14-15; Kris and Kurz, 1979, 43.

¹⁶⁰ Pollitt, 1986, 141.

¹⁶¹ E.g. Johann Gottfried Herder’s response in 1778 to Friedrich Riedel’s question of 1767 whether “Myron’s cow would please us more if it were covered in hair”: a superbly realistic work of art should not be *too* realistic, Herder argues, and must retain some idealising artifice: *ibid*, 2002 (1778), 54. Cf. Squire, 2010, 590.

of “ideal or perfect form”. The apparent contrast between idealised and naturalistic representations of the body, belies a more nuanced interplay of the two.

These two examples draw out the nuances of the literary sources examined above, showing that there was a subtler understanding of realism at work in ancient art – and in its Renaissance receptions – than the standard concept of verisimilitude allows for. This was founded upon an understanding that ‘reality’ itself was far from objective or fixed.¹⁶² Material examples of ancient art belie the supposition that representation “be restricted to imitational structures” – a supposition which, according to philosopher Arthur Danto, is “at a loss to accommodate artworks which, though they could have been perceived as representational, were clearly not mimetic.”¹⁶³ Realism is better understood as mediating between two sets of poles, which themselves shift according to historical context – art versus reality; and spiritual truth (of the kind perceived by Winckelmann) versus the unadorned or ‘naked’ truth of the real world.¹⁶⁴ Later in this chapter, I will return to this idea to argue that contemporary artists, far from stepping outside of Art History, are playing with the nature of art and reality in ways that are demonstrably classical – even if their means are different from those of ancient sculptors.

5. *A sculpture of the Pygmalion myth*

We have so far looked at examples of ancient ‘art theory’ and ‘art history’ – the extracts from Plato and Pliny – to explain what might be understood by classical realism, and thus how Gilbert & George and Wallinger may be seen as breaking away from that classical ideal. The analysis of the *Apollo Belvedere* and ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* has equally revealed some of the diverse manifestations of realism in antiquity and the Renaissance, showing how idealised and naturalistic styles of representation might work in tandem.

We have seen how the intercession of the medium is central to the experience of visualising realist sculpture *as sculpture*; and it is in this way that Pygmalion’s equivocation between *corpus* and *ebur* may be read as a caricature of the experience of looking at any realist artwork. Before returning to the contemporary artworks with which this chapter began –

¹⁶² Squire, 2011, 65.

¹⁶³ Danto, 1981, 82.

¹⁶⁴ On the role of historical context, see Danto, 1997, 50. Cf. Danto, 1981, 44-47.

artworks which make no claim to illustrate or quote the myth of Pygmalion – this section looks briefly at a post-classical depiction of the Pygmalion story. It shows how, in the hands of a Baroque sculptor, the metamorphosis of Pygmalion's statue is anything but a myth of illusionist art. It might better be seen as a myth of what illusionist art cannot do – that is, dispel its own illusion.¹⁶⁵

For the purposes of this chapter, it would have been possible to look any number of paintings of the Pygmalion myth: the medium of painting has produced countless variations on the theme.¹⁶⁶ This may be because the painter's ability to suppress the physical medium (the paint) in the service of a pictorial illusion has been felt best to serve the fable of masterful illusionism.¹⁶⁷ Yet in all painted representations, the story fails to 'come to life' except in a strictly metaphorical sense. Without the divine help that Pygmalion received, pigment on canvas cannot materialise into a living entity.¹⁶⁸ Paintings confess to their own fiction in the same way as Ovid's poetic text: just as we never cease to be aware of the picture's flatness, we never forget that we are reading a poem.¹⁶⁹

But what of the physical stuff of sculpture, Pygmalion's own medium? This might seem to offer a more direct and literal means of bodying forth a subject.¹⁷⁰ Yet there is something inescapably tautologous about trying to render in marble or bronze a story of sculpture's own transfiguration. It is for this reason, surely, that there have been relatively few sculptural depictions of the metamorphosis of Pygmalion's statue. One of the most ambitious attempts, that of Etienne-Maurice Falconet (figs. 34-35), offers telling insights into why sculptors have avoided the subject. Unveiled at the Paris Salon in 1763, this stone tableau typifies the iconography of the myth, familiar from numerous paintings. The maiden rises above her worshipful maker in a pyramidal mass. She stands atop a dais which rests in turn on a square block, before which Pygmalion crouches (on the lowest and broadest tier of the assemblage), his hands clasped in wonder. Cupid nibbles at the fingers of her right hand, testing their fleshiness.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Elsner, 2007, 131.

¹⁶⁶ Barolsky, 2014a, 81-92; Davidson Reid, 1993, vol. 2, 955-962.

¹⁶⁷ Greenberg, 1940, 28-29. Cf. Herder, 2002 (1778), 40-45.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. n. 84, above.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Squire, 2010, 592, 601. On ancient (especially Hellenistic) conceptions of realism, and their component of knowing duplicity, see *ibid*, 600-608.

¹⁷⁰ See Herder, 2002 (1778) on the depth of sculpture versus the fiction of the painted surface: *ibid*, 40-52.

For all that the sequence of internal pedestals in Falconet's sculpture may imply the gradations between art and reality (thus supplying what Victor Stoichita terms a "paratextual element"),¹⁷¹ the medium engulfs and negates the message. A contemporary critic of Falconet's was apposite in his conclusion that "the subject is superior to the possibilities of art".¹⁷² The myth is subsumed by the stillness and blankness of the object purporting to embody it – whether the marble version at Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, or the biscuit porcelain in which the composition was extensively reproduced.¹⁷³ When viewed from the side, the materiality of the object is laid bare: the cloud on which Cupid perches presents an amorphous face, harking back to the rough lump of stone from which the carving emerged. Falconet's work is squarely in the same category as the carved ivory girl that Pygmalion wishes could be real. In his marble version of 1908-9 (fig. 36), Auguste Rodin embraced the dilemma of materialising the myth by further magnifying that quality of stoniness. His figures appear either to rise from the globular hunk or to melt back into formlessness, in a dramatisation of Michelangelo's notion of the form immanent in the unhewn block ("Nothing the best of artists can conceive / but lies, potential, in a block of stone, / superfluous matter round it.")¹⁷⁴ This magnification of the medium – unthinking in Falconet's piece, overt in Rodin's, but ineluctable in both – counteracts the implied metamorphosis.

Realism, according to a view which has dominated Art History since antiquity, is bound up with illusionism. The art historian W.J.T. Mitchell describes illusionism in terms which (recalling Plato) emphasise its suppression of our critical faculties – as "the capacity of pictures to deceive, delight, astonish, amaze, or otherwise take power over a beholder".¹⁷⁵ But as we have seen, from the distinct examples of ancient and Baroque statues, such a summary of realism does little justice to the ways in which realist works of art are experienced. Realism is not simply a faculty to beguile. Nor is it a representational gold-standard, measurable in terms of proximity to 'nature'.¹⁷⁶ Rather, it is the process by which a viewer apprehends the interface between art and reality (or fails to apprehend it, in Pygmalion's case). Realism is equivocal; it points doubly to the artifice of the work *and* to what Mitchell summarises as the work's "capacity to deceive, delight, astonish ...".¹⁷⁷ We have also seen

¹⁷¹ Stoichita, 2008, 131.

¹⁷² *Mercure de France* (November 1763). Quoted in Blühm, 87. Cf. Stoichita, 2008, 130-140.

¹⁷³ Another marble version is in the Louvre: Sahut and Volle, 1984, no. 131, 451-454.

¹⁷⁴ Michelangelo, 1998, 96.

¹⁷⁵ Mitchell, 1994, 325.

¹⁷⁶ This notion becomes circular, inasmuch as nature is a construct. See n. 106 and 140.

¹⁷⁷ Mitchell, 1994, 325.

how the myth of Pygmalion as told by Ovid draws out a narrative of progressive realism (a narrative that finds striking analogies in Art History) only to expose, in the end, the farcicality or impossibility of such a narrative reaching its logical conclusion. In the drive towards realism, art continues to assert its own artificiality.¹⁷⁸ This is the case for all realist works of art – including the many examples of ‘hyperreal’ sculpture from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in which artists have continued to narrow the gap between representation and reality.¹⁷⁹

In the following section, I return to the more radical embraces of the ‘real’ which were the starting point of this chapter, in order to show how contemporary artists have come closer than their forbears to achieving the metamorphosis from art to life. Once again, the underlying tone of Ovid’s story – specifically, the anticlimactic aspects of the metamorphosis – will provide a means of analysing the contemporary examples.

6. *Found objects and living bodies in contemporary art*

In all of the artworks analysed so far in this chapter, realism is concerned with the boundary between life and art. Realist works of art alternately assert and conceal that boundary, demanding a mode of looking similar to that of Pygmalion in the first section of Ovid’s story. Such works thus inhabit what has been called “a dialectical realm of *illusionism*”.¹⁸⁰ One of the fundamental ways in which conceptual art of the twentieth-century – the broad movement of which Gilbert & George and Wallinger are inheritors – has set itself apart from this tradition, is in its apparent abandonment of representation.¹⁸¹ In contrast to the artfulness of mimetic painting and sculpture, works such as *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* and *A Real Work of Art* replace the quest for realism with ‘real’ bodies. In this way, they fulfil the myth of Pygmalion – and do so more successfully than any works which have actually depicted the myth.

But in the final part of this chapter, I will build on the analysis of Ovid’s story to argue that such a transition is, like the metamorphosis of Pygmalion’s statue, imperfect. In the same

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Barolsky, 2014, 39; Vout, 2007, 27-29.

¹⁷⁹ See n. 52.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell, 1994, 227.

¹⁸¹ On Duchamp and his legacy, see Chapter 1. Cf. Danto, 1981.

way as the post-metamorphosis woman of Ovid's story has much in common with her pre-metamorphosis model, contemporary embraces of the 'real' share much more with the classical tradition of *realism* than has routinely been supposed. As a prelude to demonstrating how Wallinger and Gilbert & George might be integrated into a classical history of realism, I will look at a sculpture by Damien Hirst. This constitutes a useful starting point because it renders explicit the idea of a borderline between life and art: bisected animal carcasses are presented as 'found objects' in vitrines of formaldehyde solution. It was the category of the 'found object' or readymade – non-representational, mundane, even anti-art – which Wallinger claimed to be testing to its limits when he bought a racehorse and turned it into *A Real Work of Art*.¹⁸² How might such a category be reconciled with the classical tradition?

6.1 Damien Hirst

I desperately wanted art to be real, not just believable. I didn't want a painting or a lightbox, I wanted the real thing. I felt that if it was real, it would be impossible to not be affected by it.

Damien Hirst, 2016¹⁸³

Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child (Divided)* (1993; figs. 12, 37-39) was one of the iconic artworks of the 1990s. Its status as 'shock art' formed part of a wider debate over whether YBA art could be defined as art at all.¹⁸⁴ First exhibited at the 1993 Venice Biennale and subsequently the centrepiece of Hirst's Turner Prize presentation in 1995, *Mother and Child (Divided)* consists of the carcasses of a cow and calf, each severed lengthways into symmetrical halves and immured in four tanks. The work is from Hirst's series 'Natural History', consisting of animals immersed in formaldehyde, which remains one of his most controversial and defining projects.¹⁸⁵ Viewed from certain angles, the four tanks appear to contain intact animals – as if grazing cattle had been plunged into preservative and frozen in time. But viewers are also able to walk 'through' the bisected bodies of each animal, via a passageway running between the pairs of tanks (figs. 37-39). By dissecting the bodies, Hirst has revealed their insides – we see the organs that would be missing from representations or

¹⁸² On how the found object (e.g. Duchamp's readymades or Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*) moved art outside of historical paradigms, see Danto, 1998.

¹⁸³ Damien Hirst, email interview with James Cahill, 12 May 2016.

¹⁸⁴ Button, 1995, n.p.; Gallagher, 2012, 16. On the 'shocking' aspect of Hirst's art, see Dillon, 2012, 21-22.

¹⁸⁵ Gallagher, 2012, 15-16. Cf. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), a fourteen-foot tiger shark in formaldehyde: Crow, 2012, 97-98.

‘bodies without organs’ in classical media such as bronze or marble. In this way, the work seems to profess its grisly realness.

It is this quality of literalism that, on the one hand, renders the work shocking (perhaps even a travesty of art) for many viewers. *Mother and Child (Divided)* (1993) might be seen as nothing more than a gruesome piece of industrial-scale embalment. Yet when it is interpreted in relation to the case studies of this chapter, above all the ancient stories of realism of which Pygmalion is the exemplar, Hirst’s work gains in integrity and complexity. It may be seen to offer a more classically *sculptural* example of stark literalism than that of Gilbert & George and Wallinger. The example of Hirst will thereby help to show how those works – in which found objects are supplanted by living bodies – may still be understood within the epistemological framework of sculpture.

The quality of literalism which might, for some, exclude Hirst’s work from the category of art, also aligns his work with the many ancient stories in which artworks are ‘so realistic as to be real’, most vividly the epigram on Myron’s cow by Leonidas of Taurentum, in which an actual cow (the voice of the poem) claims to have been forced into the role of a sculpture: “Myron did *not* forge me. He lied, driving me from the herd while I was grazing, he fixed me to a stone base.”¹⁸⁶ And so there is an ancient precedent for the literalist ‘turn’ in contemporary art, specifically in its use of found objects in the vein of Marcel Duchamp. By confronting viewers with a real cow and calf, Hirst is automatically playing out a trope of ancient literature – a trope that has become synonymous with realist art. Seen in this light, his work is not so much negation of realism as a pushing of realism to its final absurdist conclusion. Like the personified cow of Leonidas, Hirst’s mother and calf seem (at least when viewed from the installation’s perimeter) to have been plucked from the herd while grazing. And the chopping up of their bodies, while rudely dispelling this illusion, only underscores the fact of the cows’ realness. Turned inside out to reveal their organs, Hirst’s cows dumbly profess that they too were not ‘forged’ by any artist.

Indeed, Hirst’s work not only recalls the classical trope of superb realism, but manifests the underlying scepticism and bathos that were traced in Ovid’s story. As was seen, stories of

¹⁸⁶ οὐκ ἔπλασέν με Μύρων, ἐψεύσατο: βοσκομέναν δὲ / ἐξ ἀγέλας ἐλάσας, δῆσε βάσει λιθίνῳ. *Palatine Anthology*, 9.719. Cf. Squire, 2010, 604.

supreme lifelikeness are hyperbolic and rhetorical, pointing ultimately to what realism *cannot* achieve. Accordingly, there is a sense in which Hirst's work is anticlimactic – not a cow come to life, but one that is manifestly dead and immobilised. By using animal carcasses, Hirst necessarily eschews the mode of fastidious verisimilitude exemplified by 'hyperreal' artists,¹⁸⁷ in favour of something more staged: the cow and calf require a grand, enclosing structure. The tanks of formaldehyde not only preserve the carcasses in perpetuity, but sustain them as art by sealing them in a frame, or atop a kind of pedestal, separate from the outside world.¹⁸⁸ (This apparatus has regularly been compared to the geometric and austere non-representational forms of Minimalist sculpture: offsetting the extreme 'reality' of Hirst's sculpture is a more recognisably 'sculptural' quality of monumentality and stasis.)¹⁸⁹ Moreover, the effect of the formaldehyde in tincturing the animal's bodies, and the way in which the cross-section of each animal's innards is pressed up against the glass, endows the carcasses with an 'unreal' sense of deadness and flatness – turning the exposed viscera into a kind of painting (fig. 39). As Hirst explains: "In some senses *Mother and Child* is brutal yet still idealised, the bodies are severed and the insides are an objective statement, but then they float in the formaldehyde in this amazing way, almost tragically."¹⁹⁰

Mother and Child (Divided), therefore, appears to fulfil the classical trope of a 'break' into reality, but it also contrarily professes itself as an elaborate construct – a work of art. Hirst sums up the process as follows: "Even if it doesn't always look it, the urge to make art feels strongly tied to the classical tradition. Art that looks real, or purports to *be* real, just raises the question of what is real."¹⁹¹ His work skirts on the threshold of art and reality in the same way as Pygmalion's statue oscillated, initially at least, in the sculptor's mind. ("But is it art?" – the clichéd rejoinder to much of the art of the 1990s – was also surely the question that Pygmalion was asking of his statue, at least in the first part of the story). The carcasses take on a mediated appearance that has more in common with realism than with plain reality.¹⁹² This incomplete conversion of the 'real thing' into an artistic double finds a precedent in the

¹⁸⁷ E.g. Duane Hanson (1925-1996), John De Andrea, or Ron Mueck.

¹⁸⁸ On Hirst's vitrines and their historical precursors, see Dillon, 2012, 23-25; Wilson, 2012, 208. On the frame as *parergon*, see Derrida, 1987, 55.

¹⁸⁹ As the Turner Prize catalogue noted, the gory literalism of the spectacle is also balanced by a host of ennobling historical allusions: Button, 1995, n.p.

¹⁹⁰ Damien Hirst, email interview with James Cahill, 12 May 2016.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² See Wilson, 2012, 208. On Hirst's use of the 'real', cf. *ibid.*, 205-210.

closing lines of Pygmalion story, where the transition from art to life is shown to be imperfect, even self-defeating.

6.2 Gilbert & George and Mark Wallinger

To 'go beyond' the plinth is tantamount to removing the imagination from its framework, or a form from its limits.

Victor Stoichita¹⁹³

Does Hirst's installation offer a way of understanding those works in which the 'frame' is not present in the form of a glass tank, or even supplied by a gallery or institution? The examples with which this chapter began, Gilbert & George's *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* and Wallinger's *A Real Work of Art*, are not static and lifeless. Instead, they involve living bodies which might literally 'go beyond' the plinth or escape the contextualizing framework of the art gallery.¹⁹⁴ As we have seen, such works make a claim to be strikingly modern in terms of their disruption of the classical rule of art's necessary separateness from life, or what the philosopher Jason Gaiger has called the "ineliminable moment of non-identity or difference" that distinguishes a mimetic representation from a perfect copy, through a collapsing together of image and referent.¹⁹⁵ And yet, by considering these works in relation to the Pygmalion myth and its reception, it becomes clear that even these living bodies (like Pygmalion's bride) fail to cast off the classical mode of realism.

It is easy to see why Gilbert & George's *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* has been conceptualised as modern-day enactment of the Pygmalion myth, according to the commonplace view of the myth as fable of art's own transmutation.¹⁹⁶ The obvious implication of the performance is that bronze statues have come preternaturally to life. By alternating between stasis and gesticulation, silence and song, the artists play out the ancient narrative of mute rigidity metamorphosing into movement and responsiveness (their spectrum

¹⁹³ Stoichita, 2008, 114.

¹⁹⁴ On Gilbert & George's place in the wider context of performance art, see Rosenblum, 1993, 6-7.

¹⁹⁵ Gaiger, 2008, 32. Cf. Podro, 1998, 5-6.

¹⁹⁶ As mentioned above, it attracts various other ancient analogies, e.g. the singing Colossus of Memnon. See Platt, 2011, especially 299-306.

of attitudes is analogous, perhaps, to Ovid's image of wax melting beneath Pygmalion's fingers).¹⁹⁷

But is it that simple? Surely the pair's decision to turn themselves into artworks also constitutes a reversal of the Pygmalion myth as it is commonly conceived. For are they not also men turning into statues? It has been suggested that "Gilbert & George reverse the qualities commonly celebrated in Western art traditions. Instead of imbuing inert matter (e.g. marble and bronze) with the qualities of life, they devote equal effort to imbuing life with the attributes of inanimate matter."¹⁹⁸ In contravention of Pygmalion's prayer, life is sliding back into art. Where, therefore, do we situate the emphasis in a term such as 'living sculptures'? Are they living, or are they sculptures? It is significant, in this regard, that Gilbert & George also invoke another classical myth, that of Narcissus.¹⁹⁹ They are always 'reflecting' one another, each affecting to be a simulacrum of the other. Saurisse notes how in public they have "always adopted contrived and affected postures, more often than not mirroring each other, while performing stylish yet awkward stances for the public as if for a camera."²⁰⁰ Rather than simply re-enacting the superficial narrative of a statue coming alive, then, Gilbert & George pirouette awkwardly on the border of art and life. In the tradition of 'living sculptures' or *poses plastiques*, the artists play out – even pastiche – the difficulty of giving animation to something static.²⁰¹ In so doing, they replicate the ambivalent mood of Ovid's story, and re-enact its equivocal conclusion. They are male, suited versions of Pygmalion's bride at that elusive moment when she transmutes uncertainly from hard matter into flesh, and when Pygmalion cannot quite judge whether he is conceiving a woman or a statue. Simultaneously suggesting men turning into sculptures, and sculptures turning into men, they enact an ambivalent or two-way metamorphosis.

And so, while Gilbert & George appear to break beyond the restrictions of the plastic arts in *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, they also end up reinforcing them – stepping back, as it were,

¹⁹⁷ The conspicuous absence of women from Gilbert & George's oeuvre has – in the case of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, at least – a conceptual rationale. By conflating Pygmalion and his bride, and making themselves into the metamorphosed objects, their 'statues' must necessarily be male.

¹⁹⁸ Weintraub *et al*, 1996, 74.

¹⁹⁹ On the ways in which the stories of Narcissus and Pygmalion impute erotic charge to an image, see Stoichita, 5; Agamben, 1981. On the intertwining of the Narcissus and Pygmalion stories: Barolksy, 2014, 91-92; James, 2011, 22-23; Hardie, 2002, 189; Barolsky, 1998, 453; Sharrock, 1991, 36; Rosati, 1983. 51-93.

²⁰⁰ Saurisse, 2013, 107.

²⁰¹ Nichols, 2015, 63-64.

within the limits of the realist tradition they have affected to escape.²⁰² Realism is no longer achieved through painstaking illusionism. Instead, the living bodies of the artists convey the ‘illusion of realism’ (for a presentation of the work underneath the arches in Cable Street, London, in October 1969 [figs. 40-41], the artists invited their audience to “view the most beautiful, fascinating, dusty, *realistic and naturalistic* art piece bringing you a clear picture of avant-garde art today.”)²⁰³ This illusion is aided by what might be termed the stagecraft of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* – the face-paint, mechanical movements, glove, walking stick, and music.

It is precisely the oscillation (rather than a straightforward metamorphosis) between life and art that what we found in Ovid – and this is the means by which Gilbert & George reanimate the Pygmalion myth. This same oscillation extends, albeit more subtly, to the artists’ radical proposition that they are always, throughout their daily lives, works of art or ‘living sculptures’:

Gilbert: We don’t have to cover our faces with anything anymore – we are it.

George: Writers say, “They proclaim themselves Living Sculptures”. We didn’t. We were adopted by the vast general public as Living Sculptures, especially by cockneys who had never heard of artists.

Gilbert: But in general now, everybody who sees us walking, or in a restaurant – that’s it. We are Living Sculptures in front of them. We are not normal anymore. We are not normal people, when we walk the streets of London. That is true. We managed to remove ourselves and make ourselves, what do you call it, let’s say ‘stiff’. Visible. We made ourselves visible objects.²⁰⁴

Even this more radical immersion of the living sculpture into everyday life – beyond the plinth or context of the gallery – continues to rely on art being apprehended as art. As the statements above make clear, that apprehension is principally the task of the viewer (“We were adopted by the vast general public as Living Sculptures [...] We are Living Sculptures in front of them”) – the artwork is defined as such in the moment of viewing. Yet that

²⁰² On the links between performance art and the plastic arts, see Howell, 1999, 10.

²⁰³ Italics mine. Quoted in Tisdall, 1970.

²⁰⁴ Gilbert & George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015.

apprehension also relies on the maintenance of a thin membrane between untransformed reality and the ‘living artwork’: it was imperative, Gilbert implies, that they “remove” themselves from reality, becoming “objects” as opposed to mere people. According to the same imperative, Pygmalion’s bride must remain “stiff” and statuesque in order to preserve her special identity as a ‘sculpture brought to life’. In light of this, it is noteworthy that Gilbert & George reject the idea that the sculptural ‘readymade’ (or found object) began with Duchamp: instead, they associate it with the longer *representational* tradition of still life painting, as if a real-life object – once understood as art – were no different from the ephemera of *trompe l’oeil* paintings.²⁰⁵

The artists expand upon this idea of a being real and yet separate by drawing an analogy between the tramps who sing ‘Underneath the Arches’, and the early Christian ‘stylites’ who lived as martyrs in the open air (surrounded by everyday reality) and yet were elevated on the tops of columns:

Gilbert: We are like the stylites on top of their columns. Like in Syria, when there used to be people on top of columns? You see pictures of it. It was a way of, in some way, slowing down living forever.

George: They just stayed up there.

Gilbert: Forever.

George: People fed them bread and things, from baskets. I don’t think they removed the shit or anything, they just stayed there.

Gilbert: And that all becomes part of it.

George: They became a strange colour in the sun and the rain.

Gilbert: That’s what we do – in some way, remove ourselves, slow down, every action of love, that we’re still doing today. To make ourselves visible, in a different way. That’s what it is, make ourselves visible. If not we are normal, like everybody. That’s what the Living Sculpture and even our art became about.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ “It’s crazy to say that Duchamp should have invented that. I remember Art History [lessons] at Dartington, when they were talking about these amazingly boring paintings that look like a rail on the wall – where there’s a note pinned to the wall, looking like a real piece of paper – what you call *trompe l’oeil*. Those are all found objects.” (George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015).

²⁰⁶ Gilbert & George, interview with James Cahill, 21 October 2015.

The arcane reference to Christian martyrs reveals how, even when the music, plinth and face-paint of *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* have disappeared, the idea of art's metamorphosis into life continues to involve an element of 'backflow'. The artists' embrace of the 'real' is not simply a matter of turning art into reality: art retains a necessary separation, in the same way as a martyr on a free-standing column remains aloof from the world. (We might turn back, once more, to Pliny, who criticises the practice of placing statues on high columns, precisely because it removes them from the everyday realm of mortals.)²⁰⁷ The "strange colour" which Gilbert & George imagine the martyrs turning through years of isolation and exposure, may be read as a metaphor of the necessary – ineliminable – difference that exists between 'life recast as art', and the non-art of reality. Gilbert & George make clear that in order to be understood as art, life must imitate, however casually or subtly, the separateness of art (Arthur Danto has described this as "the transfiguration of the commonplace.")²⁰⁸ Such an act of imitation is an ironic inversion of the long tradition of realism – in which approximation of the 'real' is always paralleled by a restatement of artifice – rather than an abandonment of that tradition.

In contrast to Gilbert & George's self-conscious transformation of themselves into sculptors and sculptures simultaneously, Wallinger's *A Real Work of Art* extended the notion of a living work of art beyond the confines of the gallery or 'art world' into the quotidian context of horseracing.²⁰⁹ On one level, the project was too real for its own good. Free from the controls of a staged performance, the horse was injured in its first race, and appeared, therefore, to curtail Wallinger's design of "extend[ing] the Duchampian notion" of the readymade as far as possible. As a failure, *A Real Work of Art* became an anecdotal conceit – analogous to Pliny's story of Zeuxis – of something that had not been borne out in reality.

But in another sense, Wallinger's very *idea* of turning a horse into *A Real Work of Art* conferred on it the status of a representational object. In the act of naming, photographing and describing *A Real Work of Art*, Wallinger was aestheticizing (or drawing an ecphrastic frame

²⁰⁷ Pliny, *HN*, 34.27. See Barkan, 1999, 83. Cf. Kaprow: "Not only does art become life, but life refuses to be itself." Kaprow, 1960, 81.

²⁰⁸ Danto, 1981.

²⁰⁹ On the 'art world', see Danto, 1964.

around) reality: ²¹⁰ “In choosing a racehorse as the subject of a piece”, he explained in 1994, “I am signalling the fact that the thoroughbred is already an aesthetic thing, its whole purpose being to give pleasure to its owners and followers. Here, beyond representation, was the lost object which I could restore in all its fullness and potential by denoting it as a work of art.”²¹¹ The implication here is that the real body might be drawn, like Pygmalion’s living statue, back from the territory “beyond representation” into the category of representational art – objectified and aestheticized through the artist’s act of denotation. The history of breeding and the terminology and rituals of horseracing (the jockey’s ‘colours’, for instance, which Wallinger felt to be “a poetic tie-in with the act of painting”),²¹² became a way of reinforcing or ‘framing’ the representation.²¹³

In the absence of any physical pedestal or institutional context, Wallinger thus sought to place the racehorse within a discursive framework (historical and art-historical) which would be strengthened through the public reception of the work: “My greatest hope is that this project will come to take on a life of its own, that it will develop its own discourse through the reactions of the public and the press and through the build-up of the filly’s form. [...] Her career will produce a burgeoning archive of data and recordings, photographs and videos, all attempting to define her – all paradoxically rendering her as a mediated image, an abstraction.”²¹⁴ This statement resonates with Gilbert & George’s assertion that their identity as *Living Sculptures* is concretised in the perception of the public.²¹⁵ Casual observers at the races who failed to appreciate the meaning behind Wallinger’s horse’s name might almost be seen as modern-day successors to the unreflecting birds in Pliny’s story – seeing the artwork, but not ‘getting it’.

And so, as with Gilbert & George’s *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, the terms of realism were not abandoned by *A Real Work of Art*, but rather reversed. Whereas we earlier saw realism to be predicated – in classical and classicizing artworks – on an interplay between illusionistic referent and physical medium, Wallinger’s work equivocates, in the same way as Pygmalion’s transformed bride, between the abstract proposition of its being an artwork and

²¹⁰ On photography as ecphrasis, see Elsner, 2010, 23-24.

²¹¹ Quoted in Thompson, 1995, 12.

²¹² Quoted in Button, 1995, n.p.

²¹³ Cf. Danto, 1981, 83: “art differs from reality in much the same way that language does when language is employed descriptively”.

²¹⁴ Bonaventura, 1994, 7.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 40.

its physical status as a living body. The very conception of the horse as an artwork entailed a kind of reframing of the horse as a ‘representation of itself’. It was medium and subject in one; and yet Socrates’s (and Plato’s) fear that “the image, if expressing in every point the entire reality, would no longer be an image”, has not been borne out, in the sense that Wallinger considers the horse to be both an image *and* a referent. Furthermore, the relationship between this project and Wallinger’s wider oeuvre – in which the horse recurs as a representational motif (in both paintings and sculpture) – lends weight to the idea that racehorse was an extreme and bathetic inversion of the concept of realism. Wallinger remarked that: “This filly has become so over-determined by my ideas and by the history of her breed, it’s questionable whether she could ever be a good enough representation of herself.”²¹⁶ Wallinger here implies that there is an ideal representational standard (conditioned by his own “ideas” and the “history of the breed”) to which the physical horse fails to measure up. Invoking Plato’s theory of ideal and invisible Forms, this statement once again encourages us to perceive the real horse as a realist object.

Neither *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* nor *A Real Work of Art* makes any claim to illustrate or enact a mythological story, and the latter took place outside of an art institution. And yet Gilbert & George’s transformation of themselves into artworks reprises an equivocal mode of realism that was enshrined in the Pygmalion myth, and which has been seen to permeate art since antiquity. The mediation between art and reality witnessed in *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* finds a subtle parallel in Wallinger’s work: the racehorse undergoes a similar transformation, so as to function both as a real horse and as an artistic conceit – or an artfully tautologous ‘representation of itself’. With or without a classical theme, the ‘real work of art’ is a phenomenon which demands to be understood *as art*, not simply as reality; and thus to be set within an historical frame (that of representational realism) that threads back to antiquity.

7. Conclusion

The contemporary examples surveyed in this chapter have shown that a ‘real work of art’ is necessarily a contradiction in terms. In order to qualify as a work of art, a residual element of realism is required, and this works against the ‘realness’ of the work. Seen in the context of the Pygmalion story, Gilbert & George and Wallinger may be seen not simply as replacing

²¹⁶ Bonaventura, 1994, 7.

mimetic realism with unmediated reality. Instead, their works are a restatement of the problems and complexities of *realism*. As we saw from the examples of the *Apollo Belvedere* and ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman*, the ‘real’ is itself a shifting and subjective quantity. As representations of the figure, these works do not distinguish cleanly between artifice and lifelikeness; instead, they succeed in overlaying or conflating the two.

Both *THE SINGING SCULPTURE* and *A Real Work of Art* may indeed be seen as an extension of classical understandings of realism as an artistic concept defined both by transgressing the definitions of art, and by the inescapability of such definitions. The Pygmalion myth is invoked, therefore, but not as we might expect. Gilbert & George’s self-metamorphosis is anticlimactic and self-defeating in the same way as Ovid’s, in which the conceit of a statue coming to life is an absurd one – a metamorphosis that seems to loop back on itself. Wallinger’s *A Real Work of Art* demonstrates more explicitly still how reality itself may be deployed as a ‘medium’ in the service of realism, in order to tread the boundary between art and life. It affirms the fact that realism does not depend on the presence of an illusionistic representation.

Even when we have dispensed with Plato’s idea of an image needing to be different from its referent, there remains a fundamental requirement that art itself is different and retains (as Pygmalion’s bride did) the residual aura of an image. Having examined the contradictions at the heart of Ovid’s account, it becomes clear that those very artists who might seem to be at the furthest remove from conceptions of the ‘classical’, most closely apprehend the implications of the myth. The tensions the story embodies – between autonomous art object and spectator, stasis and movement, whimsy and seriousness – consistently apply to contemporary artistic probings of the boundary between art and life.

Chapter 3: The Body in Pieces

1. Introduction

[Neither] the landscapes full of ruins nor the statues with missing parts nor the unfinished works of Michelangelo are really deficient at all. Rather we should say that they are open; in other words, they admit the historical imagination as a genuinely collaborative force.

Leonard Barkan¹

This chapter moves from the theme of the formation of the body – as symbolised by the myth of Pygmalion – to address the disintegration of the body. It takes as its subject the ‘body in pieces’ in classical antiquity and contemporary art, and argues that fragmentations of the body in contemporary art derive power and meaning from, among other historical spectres, the broken bodies of classical art and literature – whether or not they explicitly or intentionally refer to ancient precedents. While contemporary artistic fragmentations of the body may often be assumed to be divorced from – or antithetical to – the classical tradition, this chapter will show how they not only profit from interpretation in relation to ancient models, but cannot ultimately be extricated from a long tradition of corporeal fragmentation in western art. That tradition begins in ancient Greece and Rome, pervades material culture and art on Christian themes – in, for example, the display of saintly relics and images of martyrdom – and has more recently been formative of modern aesthetics.

Since the nineteenth century, the body in pieces has been seen principally as a paradigm of modernity.² Over the course of the twentieth-century, the broken body became indelibly associated with the horrors of the two world wars, as reflected in sources as diverse as Henry Tonks’s paintings of maimed veterans of the First World War and Francis Bacon’s painting *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944).³ In the latter work, which coincided with the release of the first photographs and footage of Nazi concentration camps, the Christian paradigm of the mutilated body is transferred into an image of maimed, howling

¹ Barkan, 1999, 207.

² On fragmentation as a criterion of modernity see e.g. Adorno, 1997, 45, 126, 189-90 (cf. Balfour, 2009, 84-86); Benjamin, 1998, especially 175-188 (cf. Benjamin, 2003, 183); Kracauer, 1995, especially 50-57, 62-63, 238, 259-264. Cf. Frisby, 1985. On the fragmented female body and modernity: Buci-Glucksmann, 1987, 226-227. Cf. Harbison 2015, for a broader historical survey.

³ On the world wars and disfigurement, see e.g. Biernoff, 2017, 1-24, 114-137. On Bacon’s and other modern portrayals of the Crucifixion, see Régnier, 1992.

‘Eumenides’ (a powerful conflation of the contemporary, Christian and classical associations of the body in pieces). Linda Nochlin’s 1995 essay *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* – from which the title of his chapter is drawn – is a salient instance of fragmentation and dismemberment theorised as peculiarly Modernist tropes.⁴ Apart from an introductory analysis of Henry Fuseli’s drawing *The Artist Overwhelmed by the Grandeur of Antique Fragments* (1778-79), the essay says little about the classical or other historical implications of the fragmentary body in art.⁵ Contemporary art’s deployments of the body in pieces continue to be interpreted as abrasive, transgressive and (from the point of view of Art History) new – in reaction even against the tenets of twentieth-century Modernism.⁶ But in order to understand the force of the fragmentary body in contemporary art, it is necessary to set its striking ‘novelty’ in a longer history – that of Modernism, the rich Christian iconography of dismemberment and fragmentation,⁷ and the broken statues of ancient Greece and Rome that shaped Renaissance culture, together with ancient myths of dismemberment or flaying.

This chapter concentrates on the last of these frames of reference, showing how the body in pieces is a necessary and pervasive aspect of the material record of antiquity.⁸ It is clearly instanced by sculptural remains such as the *Belvedere Torso* (figs. 42-43) and *Venus de Milo* (fig. 44), and equally present in the literary accounts of violence and *sparagmos* (or dismemberment) that have inspired Western painting (e.g. the stories of Orpheus, Pentheus, Actaeon, and Marsyas) including Christian iconography.⁹ In the works of Modernists such as Rodin, whose work has been seen as formative of modern sculpture, fragmentation of the body is exaggerated in order to test the very limits of figuration.¹⁰ His influence has given

⁴ Nochlin, 1995. On fragmentation and Modernism, cf. Varnedoe, 1990, 103-181.

⁵ Ibid, 7-8. On Fuseli’s drawing, see Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, no. 22, 180-184; Pop, 2015, 70-72; Purves, 2016, 67-68.

⁶ E.g. Jones, 1998; Jones, 2000; Warr and Jones, 2000, especially 92-115, 162-177; Ross, 2006, 379, 300-395; Biesenbach, 2007, 43-80. Cf. the diachronic scope of Kemp and Wallace, 2000; Judowitz, 2001; Feher *et al*, 1989.

⁷ See e.g. Decker and Kirkland-Ives, 2015. On relics, see Walsham, 2010; MacKendrick, 2008, 106-131.

⁸ On the incompleteness of the ‘classical’, see Porter, 2006, 13, 22, 26-29. Cf. Jansen, 2016, 305-306; Armstrong, 2005, 19; Barrow, 2005, 345-347.

⁹ On classical sculptural fragments and their reception, see Barkan, 1999, 119-207. On *sparagmos*, see Lively, 2017, 287-291; Silverman, 2009, 52-55; Vicari, 1982. On myths of dismemberment or flaying in western art: Bull, 2005, 223-225, 227-228, 279-285, 301-307; Barolsky, 2014a, 25-32, 204-207. On Actaeon, see also Kilinski, 2013, 201-211; on Marsyas, Wyss, 1996; Bohde, 2003. On Orpheus as a dying and rising figure, and thus a cipher for Christ in medieval art, see Friedman, 1970, 38-85; cf. Irwin, 1982.

¹⁰ On Rodin’s fragmentary or ‘unfinished’ bodies, see Baum *et al*, 2016, 315-316; Cullinan, 2016; Varnedoe, 1990, 108-109, 126-143; Elsen, 1981c, 140-149; Rosenfeld, 1981, 96-98; Tancock, 1976, 605-638; Elsen, 1974, 172-189; Steinberg, 1972a, 338-341, 361-371.

fragmentation new meaning and beauty of form.¹¹ But his was an innovation based on an increasingly self-conscious relationship with the paradigm of the Greco-Roman and with what was meant by emulation.¹²

Immediately this raises the question of why fragmentation should have come to be seen as anything *other* than classical. Partly, the answer lies in Modernism's noisy, if largely rhetorical, hostility towards classical traditions, as discussed in the Introduction.¹³ But it may also lie in the idea, expressed by Leonard Barkan, that fragments are "open".¹⁴ Seen like this, fragments allow a peculiar panoply of associations and meanings: they appeal less to the historical moment than to the "historical imagination" in different periods and places.¹⁵ As I will show in this chapter, this idea might seem to emancipate the fragment from time and history, as if it belongs everywhere and nowhere. And yet, as much as Barkan extols the openness of the "landscapes full of ruins", "the statues with missing parts" and "the unfinished works of Michelangelo", he does not lose sight of the fact that such fragments are fundamentally classical in substance and in appearance. Indeed, they acquire eloquence from being so.

In this chapter, I will push this idea into radical territory, proposing that all fragmentary bodies in art appeal to the "historical imagination". That imagination spans antiquity, the Renaissance, and the present.¹⁶ And yet, as the chapter will demonstrate, the western historical imagination has been continually and indelibly shaped by classical histories, including the history of fragmentation. Indeed, we might say that this imagination is equivalent, in a structural and temporal sense, to the classical tradition itself – ranging, transhistorical, and composed of seams of classical or classicizing (or even anti-classical) texts, rather than being located precisely in ancient Greece and Rome.¹⁷ Post-classical deployments and manifestations of the fragmented body – be they modern sculptures, photographs of war victims, or paintings of Christian martyrs – are prefigured in antiquity. As we shall see, the historical imagination is itself a text undergoing continual reception and

¹¹ Curtis, 1999, especially 1-3, 73-82, 107-117.

¹² Pascale, 2013; Rosenfeld, 1981, 85-87.

¹³ See Chapter 1, n. 106.

¹⁴ Barkan, op. cit. Cf. Varnedoe, 1990, 126.

¹⁵ For key theorisations of the fragment versus totality, see Adorno, 1997, 125-128 (on art's "enigmatic" character), 347; Benjamin, 1998, 175-177; Derrida, 2001, 351-370.

¹⁶ For an expansive model of temporality, applied to Renaissance art, see Nagel and Wood, 2010, especially 7-20.

¹⁷ For a recent formulations of this idea, see Butler, 2016; Martindale, 2013. See n. 167.

translation (as the term ‘tradition’ implies). It will become clear how a particular trope or modality – that of the body in pieces – has the power to invoke the breadth and depth of the historical imagination, thus becoming an emblem of the classical tradition. In this way, fragmentation gives *shape* (if not place and time) to the concept of imagination. I will return to this idea in the Conclusion, in order to argue that – while *all* artworks partake to some extent of the classical tradition – certain modalities or ways of viewing intensify and concentrate that relationship.

This is not to say that all corporeal fragments in art are unequivocally classical, nor to claim a singularly classical status for artworks which were made without reference to ancient models. Instead it is to propose that fragmentation of the body has a long artistic history – a history which is ineluctably classical and classicizing;¹⁸ and that contemporary fragmentations, by dint of their own appeal to the “historical imagination”, gain from being placed within this lineage. Fragmentation of the body may allow a viewer to imbue a work of art with multiple resonances – so that it appears simultaneously old and avant-garde, grand and abject, statuesque and fleshly.¹⁹ But as we shall see, that very multivalence is an ancient phenomenon. Not only is corporeal fragmentation an aesthetic hallmark and recurrent theme of the classical tradition, but the *openness* of the fragment – the very quality which Barkan praises – is a classically-rooted concept. It is theorised in ancient literature, long before fragmentation comes to define the material remains of antiquity in the Renaissance. Contemporary treatments of the body in pieces, which invariably play upon this same quality of openness, are thus bound into a classical mode of thinking about art. As we will see, the body in pieces continually invokes the complete body, and conversely the complete body carries a sense of its own vulnerability to damage or breakage. For an illustration of this dialectic between totality and fragmentation, we might look to the ancient fable of Zeuxis’s depiction of Helen of Troy, referred to in Chapter 2, in which parts of the five most beautiful girls in Croton were synthesised through paint into a simulacrum.²⁰

In this chapter, I apply these ideas to two contemporary artworks which stand in different relations to the classical past. The first responds to classical art by way of genealogy –

¹⁸ Barkan, 1999, 120.

¹⁹ Cf. Most, 2009, 18-19. In relation to Rodin’s fragments: Elsen, 1981c, 143, 145; and the *Venus de Milo*: Prettejohn, 2006, 233.

²⁰ Cf. Chapter 2, n. 101.

developing upon the form of the portrait bust – and the second by way of analogy, in the absence of explicit classical allusion.²¹ The chapter begins by describing these examples and asking how we might set them within a longer history of fragmentation. It then traces the classical lineage of the body in pieces, which threads back to antiquity via Modernism and the Renaissance, and which spans material fragmentation and themes of violence. It ultimately shows how the lessons learned from classical ‘bodies in pieces’, and their embrace by the Renaissance and Modernism, may be productively applied to both contemporary artworks.

2. *Two YBAs: an introduction to Sarah Lucas and Marc Quinn*

The two artists whose works I have chosen to place within this historical lineage are Marc Quinn and Sarah Lucas. This chapter begins with a close analysis of a sculpture by each – Quinn’s *Self* (first made in 1991 [fig. 45] and recreated every five years since), a cast of the artist’s head made from ten pints of his own frozen blood, and Lucas’s *Cnut* (2004; figs. 46-48), a concrete cast of a figure abruptly cut off at the chest.

Why these two artists and these two works? Both Quinn and Lucas occupy a significant place in the history of the YBAs. They were at the forefront of the London art scene of the 1990s and 2000s – a scene that gave new life and notoriety to British art.²² Both artists were included in the epoch-defining exhibition ‘Sensation’ at the Royal Academy in 1997, a survey of contemporary British art drawn from the collection of Charles Saatchi, and have continued to enjoy international renown in the decades since.²³ *Cnut* and *Self* (the second appeared in ‘Sensation’) may each be seen as a depiction of a body in pieces; and as such, an example of a more pervasive phenomenon in contemporary art of the last twenty-five years.

²¹ On analogy as a critical mode, see Silverman, 2009, 1-14. Cf. Pettejohn, 2012, 167-170, 184-185. On comparativism in Art History, see Abe and Elsner, 2017, 1-4. On the construction of history through “dialectical images”, see Benjamin, 2003, 389-400, especially 395-397; Benjamin, 1999, 456-488, especially 474-475. Cf. Silverman, 2009, 179.

²² See Chapter 1, n. 17.

²³ ‘Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection’, Royal Academy, London, 18 September to 28 December 1997. See Adams *et al.*, 1997, especially 114-119, 146-149. Cf. Stallabrass, 1999, 204-233; Cork, 1997.

Writing in the catalogue for another landmark exhibition of new British art in 1995, curator Richard Flood remarked: “In 1995, London’s artists are still primarily following a figurative tradition. However, the body is fractured and unlikely to mend itself.”²⁴ While confirming the popularity of corporeal fragmentation, Flood’s statement is revealing in another respect: it attempts, somewhat paradoxically, to set contemporary art in a historical frame (“still primarily following a figurative tradition”) while at the same time claiming fragmentation as irredeemably modern, a break from history (“unlikely to mend itself”). But this chapter will argue, in line with Barkan, that fragmentation itself – and its very capacity to *seem* modern – binds contemporary art into a specifically classical history.

It would have been possible, in this chapter, to look at any number of contemporary artworks which fracture the human form in diverse ways.²⁵ But in focusing on Quinn’s *Self* and Lucas’s *Cnut*, I have selected two works which pose a striking formal contrast. One is a disembodied head, the other a headless body. This basic formal and anatomic opposition will allow a demonstration of how fragmentation is capable of invoking different classical models and analogies, to very different effect. Moreover, as has been mentioned, the two works differ in the nature of their response to classical precedents – the first consciously reinventing a classical form, the second relating (by dint of its appearance) to classical fragments. Through a comparison of the two, I will show how each sculpture not only uses fragmentation to play, in subtle and distinct ways, with the relationship between body and material, but how these varied effects go beyond the stated intentions of each artist.

The first case study, Marc Quinn’s *Self*, is popularly known as the ‘blood head’; it is a life-size cast of the artist’s head made from ten pints of his own frozen blood, installed in a refrigerated glass case which doubles as a plinth.²⁶ At first glance, we might say that *Self* is less obviously a fragment than Lucas’s headless body. This is because, as a portrait bust, it is the kind of representation to which ancient Roman culture (and the rediscovery of Roman

²⁴ Flood, 1996, 52.

²⁵ See n. 6.

²⁶ *Self* was first made for the solo exhibition ‘Out of Time’, Grob Gallery, London, 1991: *Self*, 2009, 5. It has been displayed serially in various iterations: Celant, 2013, 47-51, 56-57; de Bolla, 2001, 1, 21, 141-144; Warr and Jones, 2000, 174-175. Cf. Stallabrass, 1999, 156-157, 212. On Quinn’s practice, see Celant, 2013.

culture since the sixteenth century) has given a paradoxical sense of wholeness.²⁷ The bust evokes the whole of the body, and the whole of the person, through the part.

At the level of form, then, it is easy to see how Quinn's work fits into a classical, and neoclassical, representational tradition. This correspondence was recognised by the critic Richard Cork when the work was displayed at 'Sensation' (fig. 49): "Even a work as provocative as Quinn's blood-saturated head, refrigerated inside its steel and Perspex sepulchre, seems surprisingly at home here. It has been placed, with a feeling for ironic juxtaposition, below classical roundels filled with noble 19th-century heads of Renaissance masters."²⁸ He also observed of Rachel Whiteread's sculptures of baths that they ended up "stirring memories of antiquity [...] Majestically positioned at the far end of a suite of galleries, this purged and melancholy plaster can already be ranked among the classic British sculptures of the present century."²⁹

In remarking upon the 'surprising' appropriateness of Quinn's sculpture in the context of the neoclassical Royal Academy, Cork makes clear that it is the medium of *Self* (a "blood-saturated head"), rather than its form, that distinguishes it as radically contemporary. The use of the artist's own frozen blood takes the artwork 'off the mantelpiece' and outside of the stately category of the bust, so as to become new and provocative, suggesting decapitation as much as portraiture.³⁰ This view of *Self* as a work of rebarbative modernity had already been encapsulated by art critic Waldemar Januszczak, who wrote in 1993: "it would be disingenuous to claim that this is a work of beauty. I cannot look at it for very long. I can stand it just long enough to recognise it as one of the totemic art images of the 1990s, a work that defines our fin de siècle, and could not have been created in, or for, any other".³¹ Clearly, then, the sculpture's intersection with an antique form did not preclude it from appearing strikingly contemporary. Quinn himself draws a distinction between the work's continuity with tradition (its debt to Roman statuary), and its "extreme" or jarring materiality:³²

²⁷ On Roman busts, see Fejfer, 2008, 235-261; Fejfer, 2015; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 207-208. Cf., on busts in the Italian Renaissance, Lavin, 1975; in eighteenth-century Britain, Baker, 2014, 13-75; and in eighteenth-century France, Milano, 2015, especially 1-21.

²⁸ Cork, 1997, reprinted in Cork, 2003, 179. Cf. Macdonald, 1997; Alberge, 1997; Self, 1997.

²⁹ Ibid. On Whiteread, cf. Levy, 1997; Gallagher, 2017.

³⁰ Stallabrass, 1999, 159. On the history of busts' display, see Chapter 4, n. 38.

³¹ Januszczak, 1993.

³² On 'base materialism', see Bois and Krauss, 1997, 51-62. Cf. Kristeva, 1982, 3-4; Bradburne, 2001, especially 213-214.

JC: Why did you decide to make a cast of your head?

MQ: It's a logical extension of Roman portraiture. That idea of doing a realistic portrait head – the way that that emerges in Roman sculpture compared to the idealisation of Greek sculpture – and then taking it to a complete extreme. It's so real that not only is it the shape of a person, but it's made of the person, and it's kind of living. It has a contingency. It's reliant on something to keep it alive in the way that a person is. It has a 'being there' and 'not being there' presence.

[...]

JC: there's ambiguity in some of the critical responses [to 'Sensation'], as to whether they feel the works were subversive or actually whether there was a sort of classicism – not just in your work, but [Rachel] Whiteread's and others. There's a quote from Richard Cork, talking about the head seeming *surprisingly* at home in the neoclassical context. Why is it surprising?

MQ: It's continuity, isn't it? But obviously in a more extreme, contemporary way than before. [...] It has to be contemporary as well. But also, what is classicism? Classicism's a name given to some early manifestations of things that are pretty consistent elements of making art, or of being human. So it's obvious that those elements will be refracted and reflected in later art. Almost anything can be classical.³³

This chapter will think harder about how Quinn's work might or might not be termed 'classical'. Is it sufficient to describe *Self* in terms of a simple opposition between classical form (i.e. the bust) and contemporary medium (the blood)? Or does its bloody appearance automatically confuse the distinction between form and subject, forcing us to see fragmentation as both a static condition and a violent process? And while Quinn nods consciously to the tradition of the bust, are the other effects he perceives – the work's "extreme" quality, or its "contingency" – reconcilable with classical images and ideas? More broadly, does any debt to the classical, on the part of Quinn any other contemporary artist, have to be 'surprising' or, if not 'surprising', ironic?

The chapter's second contemporary case study is Sarah Lucas's sculpture *Cnut* (2004), which might be seen as the visual 'opposite' of Quinn's *Self* – a body rather than a head, and an

³³ Marc Quinn, interview with James Cahill, 27 November 2015.

anonymous figure rather than a portrait.³⁴ Lucas is one of the core group of YBAs who trained at Goldsmiths and participated in the now-legendary exhibition ‘Freeze’, organised by Damien Hirst in London’s Docklands in 1988.³⁵ From the beginning of her career, her work has been characterised by an interest in the human figure, which she has evoked through assemblages of mundane objects (stockings, furniture, beer cans, buckets, food).³⁶ These ‘readymade’ objects tend to function as stand-ins for parts of the human body – a pair of fried eggs on a table, for example, denoting breasts, or marrows denoting male genitalia – the emphasis on parts being crucial for accenting the body’s sexuality, fragility or absurdity.

On one level this process might appear roughshod and subversive – the very opposite of the meticulous and beautiful representations that are typically thought of as ‘classical’.³⁷ As Richard Flood noted in his 1995 essay: “[Her] work looks rushed and careless and real. It could just as easily be the traces of the soiled, improvisational décor in a vacated squat as art.”³⁸ Arguably, however, Lucas’s very isolation of body parts – her privileging of the part over the whole – sets her work within a history of fragmentation (and of thinking about the corporeal fragment) that is implicitly classical.³⁹

How might this be? As a brief prelude to the analysis of *Cnut*, I will look at the first works in which Lucas began to experiment with fragmentation – her early photographs. These compositions are useful in demonstrating how corporeal fragmentation works in two apparently contradictory ways. From the photographic sequence *Got a Salmon On (Prawn)* (1994; fig. 50), it is clear what Flood meant by “rushed and careless and real”.⁴⁰ These nine snapshots show the artist’s then-boyfriend, Gary Hume, sitting naked on a chair with his head

³⁴ *Cnut* first appeared in ‘In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida’, Tate Britain, London, 3 March to 31 May 2004 (Muir and Wallis, 2004, 18-19), and was displayed in ‘SITUATION Absolute Beach Man Rubble’, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2 October – 15 December 2013 (Blazwick and Bowers, 2013, 50-51). See Dziewior and Ruf, 2005, 39, 181. On Lucas’s early career, see *ibid*; Collings, 2002; Collings, 1997, 102-108; van Andrichem, 1996; Fairhurst, 1996; Flood, 1996a, 64-65; Flood, 1996b, 54; Kölle, 1996a and 1996b; Freedman, 1995a, 4-7; van Andrichem, 1995; Freedman, 1995b; Saltz, 1995; Schorr, 1995.

³⁵ Jeffrey, 1988; Shone, 2002.

³⁶ Dziewior and Ruf, 2005; van Andrichem, 1996, 5-6, 9-11.

³⁷ On beauty and the classical, see *inter alia* Konstan, 2014, especially 1-30, 96-108 (cf. Konstan, 2015); Settis, 2006, 13, 26-27, 41-43; Porter, 2006, 11-12, 26; Prettejohn, 2005, 15-33; Eco, 2004, 37-51; Bindman, 2002. For ancient conceptions of *to kallos* and *pulchritudo*, see Pollitt, 1974, 191-194, 423-426. On the problems of defining beauty in antiquity, see Konstan, 2014, 1-10, 31-61; Kosman, 2010; Eco, 2004, 37-39. Cf. Hyland, 2008, 4-5.

³⁸ Flood, 1996b, 54; cf. van Andrichem, 1995, 87.

³⁹ Barkan, 1999, especially 120-123.

⁴⁰ Dziewior and Ruf, 2005, 128; de Groot and Schampers, 1996, 48. Cf. Fullerton, 2016, 49-50.

and extremities excluded from the image, so that we see only a torso. His crotch is concealed and substituted, through various gestures, by a can of beer.⁴¹

When I first started knocking the head off (it was years and years ago, before I even had my first one person show), I was taking photographs of myself, with fruit and things like that. Some of them had the head, and some of them didn't. But either way, I just thought they looked almost like fashion images. So I switched over, and I started doing photographs with Gary [Hume], who was my boyfriend at the time. I had this square-format camera, and I took these shots with him like *Got a Salmon On (Prawn)* [1994].⁴² [...] the point is it's just some bloke: it's not some designer bloke, it's some bloke.⁴³

On the one hand, then, fragmentation of the body reinforces Lucas's seeming affront to 'high art' (a term so often synonymous with the 'classical' and the connoisseurship that comes with it),⁴⁴ by giving her work a desultory appearance: "it's some bloke". But is fragmentation achieving something else in these photographs besides making them seem "rushed, careless and real"? Leaving aside the banality of the images, the removal of Hume's head and limbs succeeds in imbuing his specific body with the open-endedness of a symbol.⁴⁵ The photographs evoke "some bloke" who might be almost anybody, but by the same token, they become a set of variations on the theme of sexual playacting, in which the subject's *masculinity* is paramount.⁴⁶ Fragmentation has concentrated and intensified the image's meaning. The effect is similar to that of drawings from the antique which acknowledge the brokenness of ancient statues⁴⁷ – above all, the many meticulous renderings of the *Belvedere Torso*, the celebrated fragment which will be discussed below.⁴⁸

⁴¹ The can, as a casual yet arresting detail, constitutes what Barthes termed a photographic *punctum*: *ibid*, 1981, 42-45.

⁴² First exhibited in 'Got a Salmon On (Prawn)', Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 23 April to 28 May, 1994.

⁴³ Sarah Lucas, interview with James Cahill, 24 August 2015.

⁴⁴ On 'high art', see Fisher, 2001. On aesthetics as an eighteenth-century invention, see Pettejohn, 2005, 15-63, especially 40-41; Kristeller, 1951, 496-498, 506, 510-527.

⁴⁵ Cf. Nochlin, 1995, 18-47.

⁴⁶ On masculinity and roleplaying in modern and contemporary art, see Perchuk and Posner, 1995; Brod, 1995, 16-17. Desire too may be a mobilizing force here. Cf. Barthes, 1981, 38-39. Cf. the eroticizing photography of Warhol or Mapplethorpe: Hickson, 2015; Katz, 2015; cf. Goldhill, 2011, 265-271.

⁴⁷ E.g. the drawing after *Nymph "all Spina"*, c. 1490s, where the missing parts 'fall off' the paper's edges (Holkham Album, fol. 34, Holkham Hall, Norfolk): Barkan, 1999, 141.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Aymonino, 2015, 37; Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, no. 8, 118-120, and no. 27, 199-203; Barkan, 1999, 191-196.

The same effect is clear from the sculptural casts which Lucas started to make around the same time. In one series, *Get Hold of This* (figs. 51-52), the artist's disembodied arms (cast variously in plaster, concrete and rubber), interlock in a *bras d'honneur* sign.⁴⁹ Her arms become a powerful, self-contained expression of provocation: "Even starting with the really early casts, things like *Get Hold of This*, it was about making quite specific symbols with those body parts, and that in the end is what gives the sculpture its integrity."⁵⁰ In a concrete version of the pose from 1994-95 (fig. 52), the female artist is denied a body – figured instead as two bodiless and rough-surfaced arms, whose aggressively 'male' pose raises the questions of what a female body should look like, and what it should do.⁵¹ (Later in the chapter, we shall see how a celebrated antique statue, the *Venus de Milo*, prompts similar questions about gender – in the reversed form of an armless body). By contrast, in the photographs of Hume, the focus is squarely on the man's body and his crotch, with the jokey phallic stand-in of the beer can: the subject is 'all body'.

Lucas's phrase "specific symbols" helps to explain the force of fragmentation in her work, and points also towards the ways in which fragmentation ties her 'bodies in pieces' into a longer history, within which medieval Christian relics (for instance, gold and silver reliquaries shaped as the parts of the body they supposedly contain) and classical sculptural remnants, as well as ancient anatomical votives, are powerful precursors.⁵² In her early photographs and casts alike, the corporeal fragment – however crude its formulation – acquires a metaphoric or symbolic range, an element of 'play'.⁵³ It takes on an import greater than that of stray body parts. When we come to look at Lucas's sculpture *Cnut* (2004; figs. 46-48), it is clear that fragmentation is working in a similar way, offsetting banal and untransformed reality with allusiveness. In its subject matter and materials, this work conveys the somewhat paradoxical impression of stark realism and rough facture. Both characteristics might be said to make it 'unclassical' – if, for example, we measure Lucas's sculpture against a standard neoclassical precept such as that of sculptor John Flaxman: "The lines of a Grecian composition enchant the beholder by harmony and perfection".⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Dziewior and Ruf, 2005, 95-95, 128; de Groot and Schampers, 1996, 46.

⁵⁰ Sarah Lucas, interview with James Cahill, 24 August 2015.

⁵¹ Collings, 2002, 52-57; Freedman, 1995b, 109.

⁵² See n. 7. On ancient votives, see Hughes, 2017.

⁵³ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 143-144.

⁵⁴ Flaxman, 1829, 185. On Flaxman, see Irwin, 1966, 55-67. On English neoclassicism and its debt to Winckelmann, see, *ibid*, 21-30; Trusted, 2008, 5. Cf. Eco, 2004, 244-247. On Victorian conceptions of classical perfection, see Hatt, 2001, 37-38; and on the French academic "cult of beauty" of the nineteenth century, Rosenfeld, 1981, 87. Cf. Winckelmann, 2013b (1755), 32-39; Brilliant, 2000b, 270-271. For Walter Benjamin,

Cnut may be seen as an outright assault on both “harmony” and “perfection”. As in her earlier photographs, Lucas has used a real-life model of ordinary physique, casting his body in concrete. The torso terminates abruptly at chest level in a flat – apparently razed – surface, and one of the arms is missing. The surface of the work is pockmarked and cracked. Thick seams have been left behind by the moulds, as if the artist couldn’t be bothered to refine the figure further.⁵⁵ Clenched in the hand of the other arm is an extinguished cigarette, attenuated like the body to which it is attached. The figure is shown not in a moment of heroic repose or ennobling suffering, but on a stainless steel toilet.⁵⁶ The bathos of Lucas’s humour in this way represents another kind of truncation, a cutting off of grander overtones, and this is seemingly reflected in the very title of the work – an anagram of the obscenity “cunt”.⁵⁷

Cnut therefore presents a roughshod, abject, and arguably unclassical image of a man sitting on the toilet, cigarette in hand.⁵⁸ And yet by fragmenting the body, Lucas achieves something more than bathos or sordid realism:

JC: Am I right in thinking you were the model, it was modelled on you?

SL: No, it’s Michael Clark. I made it, I cast him. I guess it was a time when we used to see quite a lot of each other. I just needed a model, but also it was nice for it to be a friend. I try and keep things in the family as much as possible. A bit more intimate than usual.

JC: But it’s not a portrait of Michael? It’s incidental that it’s his body?

SL: If anything’s *ever* incidental – but we sort of pretend it is in art, don’t we? [...] I just quite liked that thing of leaving the head out. I didn’t want it to be about him. (Like you say, it’s not really about the fact that it’s Michael.) I’m actually much friendlier towards the fact that *it is who it is* now than I was then. But I also thought, as soon as you put a head in, it becomes

Winckelmann’s neoclassicism was characterised by a “will to symbolic totality”: Benjamin, 1998, 186. Cf. McCole, 130-133. For a contrasting view of classical *disorder* see *inter alia* Warburg, 1999g; Dodds, 1951.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wagner, 2012, 52-53.

⁵⁶ “She recalls: That toilet I just found in on the street, and it had a funny sort of feel – like a prison toilet or something – and I liked that. I had it for a long while before I used it in that [sculpture].” Interview with James Cahill, 24 August 2015.

⁵⁷ On bathos and Dada, see Crangle, 2010.

⁵⁸ A key theorisation of abjection is Kristeva, 1982, 1-18.

about their face. It becomes about something completely different. Unavoidably, that's where the interest suddenly is. So it was a way of getting rid of that.

[...]

It would be diminished by not being a fragment. I can quite imagine a lot of punters do go round and think, 'where's the head and where's the top of it?' But I think for most of the more art-going public, you realise that the power of it would be diminished somehow, or it would be a totally different kind of thing. [...] If you had the head, you would just inevitably be thinking, 'Oh, that's what he must have looked like.'⁵⁹

Lucas's statements help to demonstrate how she has used fragmentation, once again, to turn a specific model into an artistic symbol, if only a symbol of abjection. What she calls the "power" of the fragment lies in the fact that a known model (Michael Clark) has been translated into an anonymous body on the toilet ("just some bloke") with no fixed identity – as she points out: "If you had the head, you would just inevitably be thinking, 'Oh, that's what he must have looked like.'" More than this, the stony material in which Lucas has cast her model means that this is no longer a "bloke" at all, but a sculpture, with the steel toilet doubling as an unlikely plinth comparable to one of the sculpted pedestals of Constantin Brancusi.⁶⁰ Unable to be perceived as an individualised portrait, the seated figure becomes a type – and can, therefore, be aligned all the more easily with an iconographic formula, that of the seated patrician figure, ranging from Pheidias's lost statue of Zeus at Olympia to Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Julius II* (1511) and Velázquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* (1650).⁶¹ 'Cnut' is also the Old English spelling of the name of the mythical king who sat before the waves to demonstrate his powerlessness before nature.⁶² The removal of the figure's head renders it all the more evocative, setting it in dialogue with an almost limitless range of precedents.

Lucas uses fragmentation, then, to transform real bodies into symbols (whether symbols of masculinity, lewd provocation, or abjection), whereas Quinn's *Self* invokes the history of the

⁵⁹ Sarah Lucas, interview with James Cahill, 24 August 2015.

⁶⁰ Elsen, 1981b, 14.

⁶¹ Cf. Chapter 1, n. 76, and this chapter, n. 132. Accounts of Pheidias's Zeus include Pausanias, *Periegesis Hellados*, 5.11.1-9; Pliny, *HN*, 34.49, 36.18-19; Strabo, *Geographica*, 8.3.30. On the cult statue of Zeus, see Spivey, 2013, 191-192; Platt, 2011, 224-234; Drees, 1968, 145-153. On the seated formula in papal portraiture, see Petrucci, 2005; Oberhuber, 1971, 130.

⁶² A separate reference may be Gary Hume's video *Me as King Cnute* (1994): Flood, 1996a, 44-45.

bust in order to imply a substitute for the particular body of the artist. And yet fragmentation also causes Lucas's sculpture to intersect with a classical history – a history which this chapter will trace. In its gaps and attritions, *Cnut* above all resembles the broken statuary of antiquity, however subversively. The work is not merely a figurative sculpture and a ranging symbol, but a work defined by its apparent brokenness. The abruptness of the body's truncation – and the uncertainty, for the viewer, over whether to view the artwork as incomplete or as an autonomous fragment (whose incompleteness is its *modus vivendi*) – means that *Cnut* appeals to the viewer's imagination in the same way as an antique fragment. Other historical modes may certainly be discerned in the artist's use of fragmentation: both *Got a Salmon on (Prawn)* and *Cnut* recall the compositional strategies of Modernism – the subject of the following section – and the playful elision of body and statue that we find (*inter alia*) in Renaissance painting. But in these respects, too, Lucas's works impel us to look at the body in ways that ultimately thread back through Art History to antiquity.

This chapter has so far concentrated on two contemporary uses of the fragment. One isolates the head in order to create a portrait: the fragment is an index. The other separates the body from the head in order to turn that body into an open-ended symbol. In both cases, a clear resemblance may be drawn with an ancient example of the body in pieces, whether the Roman portrait bust or broken statuary: fragmentation appeals to the historical imagination. In each case, too, tension arises from the contrast between the sculpture's resemblance to something classical and its sordid or grisly content: in Lucas's, it is the subject matter of a figure on the toilet; in Quinn's, the physical content of the blood. And yet, as this chapter will show, the effects of fragmentation in each sculpture (over and above these 'ironic' factors) continue to implicate the contemporary works in a classical framework.

In an attempt to qualify Quinn's suggestion that "almost anything can be classical", the remainder of this chapter will show how the body in pieces has evolved into a specific and dominant paradigm of the classical, while also constituting a versatile and expressive signifier that has been adopted by successive ages. While Quinn affords the 'classical' so capacious a meaning as to render it a cliché (perhaps even redundant), I argue that some features (namely, fragmentation) are more classical than others. The following sections trace key emergences of the 'body in pieces' in Western art – back through the Modernist and Renaissance epochs – in order to argue that fragmentation is classical in the strongest sense. I will ultimately return to *Cnut* and *Self* in order to argue that the very versatility of the body in

pieces – the expanded range of meanings that arises from fragmentation – is a concept rooted in classical antiquity.

3. *Modernism and the fragment*

In Nochlin's essay, 'The Body in Pieces', fragmentation is analysed squarely within the contexts of the French Revolution and nineteenth-century Realism, and little is made of its classical provenance.⁶³ Yet there are many ways in which Modernist experiments with fragmentation might be better integrated into Art History – as a reaction to the 'classical' history of figurative representation and the extant corpus of classical art.⁶⁴ In this section, I will do this by marshalling two examples, one Modernist and the other ancient.

The first example is the work of Rodin, the artist who made classical styles of representation appear strikingly realist.⁶⁵ In focusing on Rodin's work, the chapter steps out of the context of British art into that of European Modernism; yet it was arguably this international context that British artists of the late twentieth century aspired to be seen within.⁶⁶ My 'counter' example is the *Venus de Milo*, one of the most famous classical sculptures of the nineteenth century, and a work which Rodin admired – notably in his 1910 essay *To the Venus of Melos*. Through these examples, I will show how Rodin gave seminal expression to the Modernist aesthetic of fragmentation, and how this aesthetic broke with the fashions of neoclassical art.⁶⁷ But I will also show that Rodin's Modernist aesthetic remained, at another level, inescapably classical – linked in both appearance and effect with the damaged statues of antiquity.⁶⁸

⁶³ For a broader timeframe which nonetheless excludes the classical, see Kristeva, 2012, 91-102.

⁶⁴ Recent studies of classicism in modern art are Martin, 2016; Green and Daehner, 2011; Silver 2010. None makes extensive reference to fragmentation.

⁶⁵ On Rodin's de-elevation of sculpture, see Elsen, 1981c, 145; Tancock, 1976, 385; Elsen, 1974, 182 (cf. McNamara and Elsen, 1977, 46). The bibliography on Rodin is substantial. See especially Picard, 2013a; Lampert, 2006; Butler, 1993; Varnedoe, 1990, 126-143; Elsen, 1981a; Krauss, 1981; Elsen, 1974; Steinberg, 1972a, 322-403. On Rodin's legacy, see Curtis, 1999, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Contemporary artistic fragmentations are typically regarded as a debt to Modernism. See e.g. Rosenthal, 1997. Cf. Shone, 1997, 13.

⁶⁷ Elsen, 1981c, 140.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 141. On Rodin's collection of antiquities, see Garnier, 2013; Picard, 2013a, especially 56-97, 196-207, 330-373; Picard, 2013b, 48-49; Garnier, 2002. On Rodin and antiquity, see Picard, 2013. Elsen, 1974, 174. On Art History's marginalisation of Rodin's classicism, see Prettejohn, 2012, 146.

What might be meant by a ‘Modernist aesthetic of fragmentation’? By looking at a single work by Rodin, *Torse de Jeune Fille Cambrée* (*Torso of a Young Girl with Arched Back*) (1908, cast posthumously c. 1960; fig. 53), it is clear how Modernist art used fragmentation in a radically new way. This sculpture was first conceived in 1886 as a small, full-length figure of the Greek goddess Psyche.⁶⁹ But ultimately Rodin cast only the torso, first in plaster (for the Paris Salon in 1910) and subsequently in bronze.⁷⁰ The fin-like protuberances on the hips are all that remain of the complete figure he originally modelled.⁷¹ By isolating the torso, Rodin expunged the classical persona. It is no longer Psyche, but a mere “body of a young girl” – a work of nineteenth-century Realism.⁷² Through the act of fragmentation, Rodin moved away from the mythological personae and ancient sculptural models of academic art, and created something that was more realist in subject, and more abstract in form.⁷³ (Compare how Lucas’s removal of her subject’s head in *Cnut* transforms it from a particular person into a “symbol”).

Fragmentation might, at one level, seem to ‘de-historicise’ the Modernist artwork – freeing it from traditional categories of style or genre.⁷⁴ Rather than illustrating a narrative or conforming to a known typology, Rodin’s sculpture professes itself an object with its own narrative, and its own history. It was clearly important to Rodin that the work should look old, as if it had a past that preceded him and was beyond his control.⁷⁵ Over the course of Rodin’s career, it is possible to trace a broader movement away from traditional classical iconography as found in *The Age of Bronze* (1875-76; fig. 54; in which the *contrapposto* body of the *Doryphoros* remains identifiable), towards more fragmentary works of sculpture in which form supersedes content.⁷⁶ In looking at *Torse de Jeune Fille Cambrée*, our attention is channelled towards both the seemingly arbitrary shape and the eroded surface of

⁶⁹ Elsen, 2003, 559-63, no. 177. Cf. Picard, 2013a, 168, no. 84.

⁷⁰ Ibid. On Rodin’s isolation of torsos, see Steinberg, 1972a, 351-364.

⁷¹ Steinberg, 1972a, 393.

⁷² See Chapter 2, n. 3.

⁷³ On Rodin’s realist versus symbolic registers, see Elsen, 1981c, 144-145. Cf. Steinberg, 1972a, 349, on Rodin’s “profoundly unclassical” *L’Homme qui marche* (1906). Rodin defended this work as belonging “to those great architectural epochs that were antiquity and the Renaissance”: article in *Liberté*, Paris, 19 February 1912, quoted in Elsen, 1974, 174. Cf. Picard, 2013b, 52-54; and Prettejohn, 2012, 149-151, on the Realist turn as a different kind of engagement with the classical.

⁷⁴ For a reading of Rodin’s fragmentation as radically new, anticipating Cubism, see Elsen, 1974, 181-186. Cf. Elsen 1981c, 140-141, on the dual novelty and classicism of Rodin’s plaster fragments.

⁷⁵ Compare the concept of authorial impersonality in Modernist poetry: Ellman, 1987. On the *membra disiecta* of Rodin’s studio at Meudon, see Elsen, 1974, 175-178; Picard, 2013b. Cf. Rilke, 1986, xi.

⁷⁶ On *The Age of Bronze*, see Butler, 1981, 23-24, 33-34; Tancock, 1976, 342-356. The absence of the spear (the defining attribute of Polykleitos’s ‘original’) expropriates Rodin’s figure from theme: Butler, 1981, 34. Cf. Prettejohn, 2012, 145-147.

the work – its rugged modelling and matte-green patina. In a similar way, the cracked and clotted surfaces of Lucas's *Cnut* and Quinn's *Self* are immediately perceivable.⁷⁷ The 'realist' work of modern sculpture is also capable of seeming immeasurably ancient: antiquity is given back its age, as if centuries of cosmetic investment (seen most recently in neoclassicism) had been stripped away. Rodin thus transformed the body in pieces from an elegiac fact of history into a sculptural device that could appear antique – recalling broken and timeworn antiquities – and modern, capturing the flux of contemporary existence. It has been remarked that "This bronze, in its fragmentary state, has all the grace of a mutilated antique excavated from the earth."⁷⁸

Such a view of Rodin's work was advanced by the poet and critic Rainer Maria Rilke. His 1903 essay on Rodin promoted the idea of the fragment as an artistic whole, and emphasised the work's autonomy from the external world or from history.⁷⁹ In a description of the sculpture *Voix intérieure* (1896),⁸⁰ for example, he wrote: "The arms are noticeably absent. Rodin felt them in this instance to be too easy a solution of his problem, to be something extraneous to the body, which sought to be its own concealment, without external aid. [...]. The same effect is produced by the armless statues of Rodin; nothing essential is lacking. We stand before them as before something whole and complete, which allows of no addition."⁸¹

Yet even if Rodin's use of the fragment precludes classical *reference*, the corporeal fragment itself remains implicitly classical. Precisely by moving away from an academic mode of neoclassicism (or what Aby Warburg, quoting Winckelmann, called "the narrow Neoclassical doctrine of the 'tranquil grandeur' of Antiquity"),⁸² in favour of a more unresolved style of Realism, Rodin was also invoking antique sculpture – both the degraded condition and the (in many cases) debatable signification of recent discoveries such as the Parthenon Sculptures and the *Venus de Milo*.⁸³ In so doing, he was consciously invoking the *non finito* aesthetic of Michelangelo.⁸⁴ Ironically, the more Rodin 'broke' classical models, the more he asserted the

⁷⁷ Cf. Varnedoe, 1990, 127, 130.

⁷⁸ Goldscheider, 1999, 126. Note the provocative equation of "grace" and "mutilated". Cf. Rodin, 1911, 410.

⁷⁹ Rilke, 1986.

⁸⁰ Blanchetière, 2013.

⁸¹ Rilke, 1986, 17-19, 18. Cf. Krauss, 1986, 155.

⁸² Warburg, 1999c, 553. Cf. Read, 1987, 12.

⁸³ Prettejohn, 2012, 144.

⁸⁴ Rodin's debt to Michelangelo has been widely documented. See *inter alia* Getsy, 2010, 31-57; Fergonzi *et al*, 1997, especially 69-81; Butler, 1993, 91-98; Varnedoe, 1981, 161-166; Elsen, 1974, 174, 180-181. On the intertwinement, for Rodin, of Michelangelo and Pheidias, see Prettejohn, 2012, 146. For a contemporary's view

quality of brokenness that has become such a powerful attribute of the classical. In this regard, *Torse de Jeune Fille Cambrée* is more authentically classical than any of the complete, polished allegorical bodies of neoclassical art, such as those located close to Rodin's work in the Fitzwilliam, on the Founder's Building landing.⁸⁵ As a fragment, Rodin's body confronts the problems embedded in the 'neo' prefix in neoclassicism. Rather than smoothing over the losses and accretions that define the classical tradition, and trying to restore them into a confected totality, his sculpture asserts its brokenness. Through the traces that remain of the model's hands, his "young girl" continues to allude, if only elliptically, to the mythological heroine that she once was, but can never now resolve into a whole. On one level, then, Rodin's use of fragmentation was a bold new compositional device – a breaking of the neoclassical body into Modernist pieces – which epitomised a new, Realist mode of making art.⁸⁶ But on another level, Rodin was knowingly – and inevitably – invoking broken classical statuary.⁸⁷

When we turn to the *Venus de Milo* (fig. 44), it is striking that it, too, is an object that acquires new meanings and heightened beauty from its state of incompleteness.⁸⁸ As Elizabeth Prettejohn has noted, it is the absence of arms which "creates the distinctive silhouette so important to the statue's modern celebrity": lack has been reconfigured as a positive attribute.⁸⁹ The *Venus* almost immediately became a cultural icon after its discovery on Melos in 1820 and installation in the Louvre in 1821, and its allure was arguably enhanced by its archaeological lacunae.⁹⁰ The statue was interpreted variously as one half of a *Venus and Mars* group (the goddess of love victorious over the god of war), a tutelary deity of Melos, and a version of Praxiteles's *Aphrodite of Cos*.⁹¹ Artists and critics in the nineteenth century readily envisioned the fragmentary body as being as beautiful as – if not superior to –

of Rodin's debt to Michelangelo and antiquity, see Bienne, 1898, 267, quoted in Rosenfeld, 1981, 87. On Rodin's *non finito* aesthetic, see Getsy, 2010, 88-91; Rosenfeld, 1981, 82, 88, 96-99; Steinberg, 1972a, 393-395.

⁸⁵ On neoclassicism in England, see Trusted, 2008, 5-7; Baker, 2000, 161-162. For a contemporary perspective see Gosse, 1894, 138, who argues the desuetude of "the conventional tradition of Canova".

⁸⁶ See n. 2, 4.

⁸⁷ Cf. n. 68.

⁸⁸ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 89, 328-330. See especially Prettejohn, 2012, 71-103; Prettejohn, 2006; Havelock, 1995, 93-97; Hales, 2002; Pollitt, 1986, 167-168.

⁸⁹ Prettejohn, 2006, 233. Cf. Hales, 2002, 254-255.

⁹⁰ Curtis, 2003, 11-36; Prettejohn, 2006, 232. For a summary of 'positivist' or 'historicist' approaches, and their limitations, see *ibid.*, 228-231. On the *Venus de Milo* as a paradigm of Venus, see Beard and Henderson, 2001, 116-20; Brilliant, 2000a, 4.

⁹¹ The interpretations were advanced respectively by Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, Toussaint-Bernard Eméric-David, and the Comte de Clarac: Prettejohn, 2006, 232-234. For other interpretations, see *ibid.*, 230.

a complete one. Walter Pater wrote in 1872 that the frayed surface and softened lines of the statue meant that “some spirit in the thing seems always on the point of breaking out”.⁹² He moreover affirmed the diachronic resonance of the *Venus* – its capacity to invoke a broader history of fragmentation – by comparing the statue with the *non finito* sculpture of Michelangelo which would so inspire Rodin.⁹³

From Pater’s description alone, it is clear that the *Venus de Milo* was regarded, in the century of its discovery, in ways that privileged its expressive incompleteness over its ‘original’ subject or form.⁹⁴ In this sense, it could be understood in much the same way as a Modernist body in pieces such as Rodin’s. The possibility of an equivalence between (or more radically, an elision of) ancient and modern fragmentations of the body is vividly expressed by Rodin’s own essay *Venus: to the Venus of Melos*.⁹⁵ This praises the *Venus de Milo*, incongruously, as if it were an exemplar of nineteenth-century Realism: “In beautiful sculpture, as in beautiful architecture, the fundamental principle is, that the representation of life, in order to retain the infinite suppleness of nature, should never be arrested, fixed.”⁹⁶ Almost disingenuously, Rodin extols the modern-day reality of the *Venus*’s body (its “representation of life”) as if oblivious to its ancient provenance or content: “Thou art no dumb, unproductive statue, image of some unreal goddess”.⁹⁷ Like Pater, he admires the surface of the work – perceiving an almost painterly play of “light and shade”.⁹⁸ Most revealingly of all, he doesn’t simply claim the *Venus* for his own era, as a Realist work of art, but characterises her as the sum product of multiple generations,⁹⁹ and appropriates her as a metaphor for his own memory: “For myself, the ancient masterpieces blend themselves into my memory with all the joys of my early manhood; or rather, the antique is my youth itself, which surges still in my heart and

⁹² Pater, 1920, 67. See Østermark-Johansen, 2011, 37-39; Prettejohn, 2006, 246-247; Jenkyns, 1991, 251-260. On nineteenth-century responses (critical and artistic), see Nichols, 2015, 10-11, 101, 185; Prettejohn, 2006, 235-238; Curtis, 2003, 50-163; Hales, 2002.

⁹³ Pater, 1920, 56-57. For a recent survey of incompleteness or *non finito*, see Baum *et al*, 2016. On Michelangelo’s *non finito* sculpture, see Bambach, 2016, 30-35, 37-41.

⁹⁴ Haskell and Penny however conjecture that the statue “would have been restored had it not been for uncertainty as to the form this should take”. Ibid, 1981, 329 (cf. *ibid*, 103).

⁹⁵ Rodin, 1911, 409-413. The original French text was published in 1910: ‘A la Vénus de Milo’, *L’art et les artistes*, 11, 1910, 243-255.

⁹⁶ Rodin, 1911, 413.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 410, 413.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 412. Rodin similarly praised the surface of the *Venus de Medici*: Gsell, 1971, 55, quoted in Rosenfeld, 1981, 81. Cf. Pater’s “Hellenistic” attention to surface: Prettejohn, 2006, 247. ‘The New Sculpture’ of late nineteenth-century Britain was defined by Edmund Gosse in terms of an emphasis on surface: Gosse, 1894, especially 140, 142, 200, 281-282, 311. Cf. Hatt, 2001, 44-46. For discussions of surface versus depth in relation to the ‘classical’, see Purves, 2016, 67-68, 74; Slaney, 2016, 87-93.

⁹⁹ Rodin, 1911, 409.

hides from me the fact that I have grown old.”¹⁰⁰ Invigorated and invigorating, the *Venus* is here subsumed into a Modernist stream of consciousness.¹⁰¹

Arguably, Rodin is able to downplay the work’s antiquity, and to recontextualise it as something modern, precisely because its original form and context have been lost.¹⁰² In other words, the very absences of the *Venus de Milo* – its physical incompleteness, combined with its lack of definite subject or known author – have made it so inspiring an object. And so, like Rodin’s *Torse de Jeune Fille Cambrée*, the work is historically versatile – able to seem simultaneously ancient and modern. Elizabeth Prettejohn has argued that the *Venus* was perhaps “specially resonant” for “the sensibility of the Romantic period; thus its visual appearance was modern, in one way, as well as ancient in another.”¹⁰³ And indeed, it might be argued that such a way of looking at the *Venus* is a symptom of the particular era in which it was discovered: the restoration of antiquities, which had been commonplace throughout the 1500s and 1600s, became less fashionable over the course of the nineteenth century, while fragmentation acquired heightened cachet through Romantic art and literature.¹⁰⁴ The nineteenth century saw a fashion for de-restoration, and the twentieth century saw the Louvre’s removal of the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman* (fig. 33) from his bath of blood-red porphyry, and the symbolic removal of Bertel Thorvaldsen’s restorations from the best Greek statues in the Munich Glyptothek (after World War Two).¹⁰⁵ In 1809, the scholar Edward Daniel Clarke decried the “spurious additions” which had “degraded” the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 6).¹⁰⁶

As an ‘original’ work of art in 1820 – belonging as much to modernity as to antiquity – the *Venus de Milo* might, therefore, be seen to conform to both the assertions in Friedrich Schlegel’s much-quoted dictum of 1798: “Many works of the ancients have become

¹⁰⁰ Rodin, 1911, 412. Cf. Rodin’s description of his method, quoted in Lawton, 1906, 162-163.

¹⁰¹ Compare the tone of Winckelmann’s 1759 passage on the *Belvedere Torso*: *ibid.*, 2013a, 143-147.

¹⁰² Cf. Pater’s claim, in his essay on Winckelmann, that the *Venus* is “in no sense a symbol, a suggestion of anything beyond its own victorious fairness” *Ibid.*, 1920, 205. Cf. Jenkyns, 1991, 257. On the longer tradition of seeing antiquities as autonomous objects, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 102; Marvin, 2008, 36.

¹⁰³ Prettejohn, 2006, 235.

¹⁰⁴ Prettejohn, 2006, 238; Settis, 2006, 30-33; Kemp, 2000, 67; Howard, 1990, 25-26; Bann, 1989b, 105; Rosen and Zerner, 1984, 24-28; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 103. On the re-setting of the *Venus de Milo* in 1871, see Nichols, 2015, 101; Prettejohn, 2006, 238. On classical fragments in post-revolutionary France, see Bourgeois, 2009. On the Romantic allure of ruins, see Thomas, 2007; Eco, 2004, 249-251; Dillon, 2014, 5-12. On ruins as allegories, see Benjamin, 1998, 171-178.

¹⁰⁵ Beard, 2013, 225-227; cf. Howard, 1990, 24-26; Daehner, 2011, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, 1809, iii.

fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin.”¹⁰⁷ Yet it is equally clear that the *Venus* is an inherently elusive object: its incompleteness resonates in ways that go beyond either Romantic aesthetics of ruination, or Modernist conceptions of the primacy of the fragment.¹⁰⁸ Its non-aligned shoulders and *contrapposto* stance are common to many Greco-Roman statues, but there is no finite pose to anchor that movement. The statue is poised not only between wholeness and disintegration, but between an appearance of movement and stasis. There is simultaneously a gendered aspect to the statue’s ‘inbetweenness’.¹⁰⁹ In the nineteenth century, observers disagreed over whether she was androgynous or archetypally feminine. The archaeologist Toussaint-Bernard Eméric-David, refuting the identification of the statue as Venus, suggested that there was *quelque-chose de mâle* about the figure.¹¹⁰ But beyond that cultural context, sexual ambiguity is encoded in the broken form of the statue.¹¹¹ Robbed of the *pudicitia* that the arms shielding the breasts would imply, Venus is both more vulnerable yet more confrontational.

The *Venus de Milo* is, therefore, more than a sounding board for the fashions or ambivalences of its nineteenth century milieu. Rather, it is inherently ambivalent – the “very ground of ambivalence”, in Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott’s oxymoronic phrase.¹¹² Receptions of the *Venus* in later art attest to this quality. In contrast to the epistemological limitations imposed by the sculpture’s archaeological gaps, which have necessitated the *Venus*’s demotion from the point of view of archaeologists,¹¹³ its inbuilt layers of ambivalence – whether of movement, gender, eroticism or period – have catalysed myriad artistic receptions. Responses to the *Venus* have almost universally embraced its fragmentary condition, and played upon its capacity to be translated into different periods and contexts.¹¹⁴ They have even magnified its fragmentariness.

¹⁰⁷ Schlegel, 1991, 21.

¹⁰⁸ “[T]he goddess ultimately stands apart in sublime indifference”: Havelock, 1995, 96. Cf. the positivist reading of Furtwängler, 1895, 367-401.

¹⁰⁹ For a psychoanalytic reading of the *Venus*’s gaps, see Fuller, 1980. Cf. the recuperative impulse of Clark, 1956, 83.

¹¹⁰ Eméric-David, 1853, 190. Quoted in Prettejohn, 2006, 233. Cf. Barlow, 2017, 43, on reactions to Walter Crane’s *The Renaissance of Venus* (1877). A roughly contemporaneous view of the *Venus* as alluringly feminine occurs in Théophile Gautier’s 1852 story ‘Arria Marcella: Souvenir de Pompéi’: Gautier, 1995, 127. See Lively, 2011, 110-11; and Chapter 4.

¹¹¹ On the *Venus de Milo*’s mobilisation of desire, see Salmon, 2000.

¹¹² Scott and Arscott, 2000, 15. Cf. Arenas, 2002, 36; Walsh, 1998, 15.

¹¹³ Furtwängler, 1895, 367-401, especially 375-6. Cf. Prettejohn, 2006, 240-241; Curtis, 2003, 122-131, 146-153; Havelock, 1995, 96, 139.

¹¹⁴ E.g. Rodin’s unfinished *Monument to Whistler* (1905-1917): Østermark-Johansen, 2011, 183. Exceptions include Albert Moore’s painting *A Venus* (1869): Smith, 2001, 94; Jenkyns, 1991, 270. Academic responses to

For example, in his sequence of variations upon the sculpture, Salvador Dalí dramatises the quality of openness that comes of fragmentation, by imagining the *Venus* as a receptacle of half-open drawers. *Venus de Milo with Drawers* (1936; fig. 55), the earliest iteration, is a half-size plaster cast of the statue in which the drawers make the object appear on the brink of toppling.¹¹⁵ It might either be viewed as a reliquary, filled with hidden significance, or as a vessel that has been emptied of its contents – evacuated of meaning and thus able to be filled with new signification.

But again, as with Rodin's sculpture, the *Venus*'s ability to stand outside of history (to be 'de-historicised') only goes so far. In all its receptions, the *Venus* is still a Venus. For all that Rodin underplays her godlikeness in his essay, claiming to perceive a woman rather than an idol, his words carry a tone of ardent veneration (verging on parody) that is only redeemed by the fact that it *is* directed at a goddess. In appropriations such as Dalí's, the *Venus de Milo* remains inexorably classical, and her brokenness is inseparable from – indeed, bears witness to – her classical identity. However versatile or timeless the *Venus* appears, she never loses her classical iconicity: arguably, she would become meaningless if she did. Moreover, even if we leave aside the statue's ineffably classical *appearance*, it is the very versatility of the body in pieces – reflected in the ways that the *Venus* has been appropriated and re-appropriated – that renders her fundamentally classical. This is because, as the following section will demonstrate, the Renaissance had enshrined fragmentation as a criterion of the classical tradition.

What this section has shown is that Rodin's work, which has become emblematic of Modernist sculpture, used fragmentation in a strikingly new way: it broke away from the idealised bodies of neoclassicism.¹¹⁶ And yet the indeterminate appearance and meaning of the Modernist body in pieces – its ability to collapse together the categories of ancient and modern – linked it inextricably with the broken statues of antiquity. Rodin's mode of Modernism was indeed bound up with the discovery and reception of ancient statues such as

the *Venus* have varied between speculatively recompleting the statue and embracing its brokenness; in the former camp is Clark, 1956, 88-89.

¹¹⁵ Dalí, 1942, 312; Judowitz, 2010, 162; Squire, 2011, 27-28. On modern responses to the *Venus*, see Siapkas and Sjögren, 2014, 137-138; Prettejohn, 238-244; Curtis, 2003, 195-200; Arenas, 2002, 38-44; Hales, 2002, 268.

¹¹⁶ Krauss, 1981, 9-10, 18-26.

the *Venus de Milo*. The very quality of openness that resulted from fragmentation was – as we shall see – a classical phenomenon. This openness was recognised in antiquity and subsequently came to define the classical tradition (as a tradition characterised as much by loss as survival) in the Renaissance. Rodin’s fragmentary bodies and the *Venus de Milo* are alike in acknowledging and literalising the ‘-ism’ inherent in ‘classicism’. They reflect the fact that classicism is a fluid process, akin to subjective thought (or to Rodin’s “memory”, in which youth and antiquity intermingle), rather than a finite entity.

4. *The Renaissance and the fragment: the Belvedere Torso*

While the fragment may have held a particular appeal in the nineteenth-century, the premium attached to it did not originate in the Romantic era. Fragmentation had come to circumscribe understandings of classical art long before; and the *Venus de Milo* was far from the first statue that came to be prized because of – rather than in spite of – its losses. In this section, I will look at an example of a broken classical statue that acquired iconic status in the Renaissance. I will show how, even in an era that favoured wholesale restoration, the body in pieces came to be writ large as an indelible characteristic of the classical canon, as opposed to merely a by-product of history.¹¹⁷

From the fifteenth century, ancient statues – almost invariably broken – were excavated, restored and in many cases enshrined as models for artists.¹¹⁸ Broken classical statuary had been widely visible before this time,¹¹⁹ but it was the self-reflexive ‘finding’ of classical antiquity occasioned by Renaissance humanism which brought about new set of responses to the fragment. In François Perrier’s 1638 anthology of classical statues, almost every statue is shown as a restored (or nigh-on restored) whole.¹²⁰ We might say that the Renaissance ‘rediscovery’ of classical sculpture was defined by a process of reparation and a drive towards wholeness. And yet the very fact that restoration was so popular in the Renaissance

¹¹⁷ On restoration, see Howard, 1990, especially, 12-41; Coltman, 2009, 84-116; Barkan, 1999, 174-189; Rossi Pinelli, 1986, especially 183-191; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 66, 102-104. On the parallel development of concepts of the ‘Renaissance’ and the ‘classical’, see Settis, 2006, 52-55.

¹¹⁸ Vasari, 1996, 804-805.

¹¹⁹ Barkan, 1999, 121-124.

¹²⁰ On Perrier, see Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 41-42; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 21-24; Thirion, 1971. On prints after the antique, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 16-22. For an example of aggressive reworking in antiquity, see Cicero, *In Verrem*, 2.4.

also shows that artists were working consciously and creatively with the ‘gaps’ of classical art.¹²¹

Even in the Renaissance, there were statues that were broken but nonetheless famous – the *Pasquino*, the *Tyrannicides* (albeit unrecognised as that subject) and similar ‘gladiator’ fragments, and the *Belvedere Torso* (figs. 42-43), which is shown on the frontispiece of Perrier’s anthology (fig. 56).¹²² For this section of the chapter, I will focus on the *Belvedere Torso* because it was this broken sculpture, more than any other, that captured the imagination of Renaissance artists and came to stand, in a larger sense, for the classical past. Whereas the *Pasquino* fragment (fig. 57) became a familiar landmark – the earliest ‘talking statue of Rome’ where people posted polemics and poems (*pasquinades*) – it was the *Torso* that artists first responded to in ways that actively theorised its brokenness.¹²³ As I will show, the decision *not to restore* the *Torso* has taken on special significance: it has been written into Art History as an act of inspired intervention. This differentiates the statue from the other two notable examples just mentioned, but also from the thousands of other broken antiquities in Renaissance Italy. In addition to this, the *Torso* may be seen as an ancient forerunner of Lucas’s *Cnut*, a body without a head, and thus helps to show how the contemporary art might be aligned, both in appearance and impact, with the ancient ‘body in pieces’.

How did the *Belvedere Torso* become one of the most famous classical statues of the Renaissance, and to what extent was its fame bound up with its brokenness? Partly, its fame can be linked to the context of its early patronage and display. From the earliest records of the sculpture, there is no suggestion that it was regarded as special in the first century after its discovery; it was first sketched lying on its side.¹²⁴ But as Haskell and Penny have argued, the placement of the *Torso* in the Cortile del Belvedere, following its acquisition by the Vatican, was “itself sufficient to act as a consecration of quality”.¹²⁵ Turned upright, the statue was set

¹²¹ Howard, 1990, 17; Barkan, 1999, 173-174, 185.

¹²² Perrier, 1638. *Pasquino*: Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 72, 291-292. *Tyrannicides*: Barkan, 1999, 174-176; Brunnsåker, 1971. *Belvedere Torso*: Haskell and Penny, 1981, 10, no. 80, 311-314; Barkan, 1999, 189-201; Wünsche, 1998a and 1998b; Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, no. 132, 166-168; Schweikhart, 1982; Säflund, 1976; Schwinn, 1973; Andrén, 1952. Cf. Howard, 1990, 70, on the decision not to restore Myron’s *Discobolus* torso until the eighteenth century.

¹²³ Haskell and Penny, 1981, 291-292.

¹²⁴ On its discovery and acquisition by Cardinal Colonna, Andrea Bregno, and the Vatican, see Schmitt, 1970, 107-113; Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, 167; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 311-312; Barkan, 1999, 191-197; Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 118.

¹²⁵ Haskell and Penny, 1981, 10. Cf. Brummer, 143-152. On the Cortile del Belvedere, see Ackerman, 1954; Tronzo, 2009, especially 42-43.

on a par with the illustrious (restored) statues in the same setting, including the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 6), the *Laocoön* (fig. 3), the ‘*Ariadne*’ / *Cleopatra* (fig. 8), the *Hercules Commodus*, and the large rivers *Tiber* and *Nile*. Through this placement at the heart of the incipient ‘canon’ of classical art, the *Torso* moreover became accessible to living artists: the papal collection was one of the key resources for ‘learning from the antique’.¹²⁶ Vasari referred to the statue in 1568 in a list of the “finest works of art mentioned by Pliny dug out of the earth”, which served as inspirations to artists of the day.¹²⁷

But the *Torso*’s prestigious location does not on its own explain why it became such an iconic work. Rather, it was the decision to leave the *Torso* as a fragment that rendered it singular.¹²⁸ This statue was markedly different in appearance from the restored statues surrounding it; within the prominent and authoritative context of the Cortile del Belvedere, it was both canonical and powerfully anomalous. While ambiguous authorship and content are not unusual (most ancient statues, whether restored or fragmentary, were subject to shifting identifications in the sixteenth century and after),¹²⁹ the *Torso* is different in that its uncertain provenance and unknown subject find a parallel in its physical gaps. Even more than that of the *Venus de Milo*, the figure’s pose is unresolved – seated yet implying animation through a twisting midriff and tensed thighs, which are lopped above and below each knee.¹³⁰ A sheer rugged facet has taken the place of the head and upper abdomen, which may have been shorn off to be displayed separately, or integrated into a new figure.

In this respect, the *Torso* violently disrupts the idea, popularised in the Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti, that particular emotions or “movements of the soul” (*motus [...] animorum*) find outward expression in specific classical poses.¹³¹ The idea was later developed by art historian Aby Warburg in his theory of *pathosformel* (“pathos formula”), whereby certain postures connoted particular extremes of emotion; each nexus of form and feeling could be subtly adapted by artists, provided that the essentials of gesture remained in place.¹³² Yet the decision not to restore the *Torso*, so that it might conform to one of these definable

¹²⁶ Haskell and Penny, 1981, 313, n. 28.

¹²⁷ Vasari, 1987a, 251. Cf. Prettejohn, 2012, 9-10.

¹²⁸ Howard, 1990, 21-22.

¹²⁹ Barkan, 1999, 124-128, 134-144, 150-151, 178-185.

¹³⁰ Barkan, 1999, 144, notes the inherent ambiguity of “bodies that are bending, crouching, and turning”.

¹³¹ Alberti, 1972, 82. See *ibid.*, 80-85. Cf. Wolf, 2000, 176-177.

¹³² E.g. the *Laocoön* becomes the *exemplum doloris* or paradigm of agony: Warburg, 1999c, especially 558. Cf. Warburg, 1999f and 1999d, 279; Spivey, 2001, 118-121; Brilliant, 2000b, 272-273; Ettlinger, 1961.

“movements”, shows how it could equally be venerated as a fragment. According to tradition, Michelangelo refused a request from Pope Julius II to repair the *Torso*, guaranteeing its survival as a fragment.¹³³ There is a story, attributed to Bernini, that Michelangelo was discovered kneeling before the *Torso* – supposedly to examine it more closely, although the subtext of worship supports the familiar narrative of veneration.¹³⁴ He is also said to have declared: “this is the work of a man who knew more than nature!”¹³⁵

What do these stories of reverent refusal and adulation tell us? Firstly, that even in a culture where restoration was the norm, the ‘body in pieces’ need not be interpreted simply in terms of loss: it gaps could also be understood as eloquent. Michelangelo’s supposed statement is especially significant in that – while invoking the familiar Renaissance and Plinian *paragone* between art and nature – it endows the *Torso*’s creator with an impossible level of genius (“a man who knew more than nature”).¹³⁶ Despite the fact that the *Torso* bears a signature – “Apollonios, son of Nestor, Athenian”¹³⁷ – the statue carries no name recognition. Apollonios is not recorded by Pliny (despite what Vasari would have us believe), and we have no anecdotes that show how human he was. Michelangelo’s statement represents the statue’s creator as more than a man; his claim would surely have seemed hyperbolic or hubristic in relation to an undamaged artwork of known attribution. It highlights the fact that the *Torso*, as it survives, is the work of no single individual. Rather, its beauty and perfection are the chance formulations of time and fate, and are thus beyond attribution or even description. The *Torso* might therefore be admired as the serendipitous product of successive ages – as an

¹³³ Andr  n, 1952, 4-5. Gian Paolo Lomazzo professed: *Michel’ Angelo [...] non   mai potuto aggiungere alla bellezza del torso d’Hercole [...] che fu da lui continuamente seguitato* (“Michelangelo could never add to the beauty of Hercules’s torso [...] which was continually studied by him”): Lomazzo, 1822 (1584-1585), 381. Quoted in Andr  n, 1952, 4. Cf. Haskell and Penny, 1981, 103, 312.

¹³⁴ Fr  art de Chantelou, 1885, 26. Cf. Haskell and Penny, 1981, 312 and 314, n. 19. Aldrovandi noted that the *Torso* was *singularmente lodato da Michel’ Angelo* (“singularly praised by Michelangelo”): *ibid*, 1556, 120. This is the first recorded mention of Michelangelo’s praise (a platitude according to Barkan, 1999, 200). A sketch from the 1550s bears the annotation: “This pees doth michelangel exstem above al the anttickes in belle federe”: Barkan, 1999, 196-197 (Trinity College, Cambridge: MS R. 17.3). Cf. Lomazzo: *e divenuto preossoch  cieco compiacevasi di scorrerne tutte le forme colle dotte sue mani* (“[Michelangelo] went blind and took pleasure in covering all its shapes with his hands”): *ibid*, op. cit., 381. Joachim von Sandrart embellished the story through reference to Michelangelo embracing and kissing the *Torso* (and other antiquities): *ibid*, 1675-1679, 33-35. Cf. Haskell and Penny, 1981, 21. On Michelangelo’s role in canonising the *Torso*, see Barkan, 1999, 197-203; Andr  n, 1952, 4-5.

¹³⁵ *Questa e l’opera d’un uomo che ha saputo pi  della natura*. Fr  art de Chantelou, op. cit. Cf. Barkan, 1999, 200; Vasari, 1962, 2100-2111.

¹³⁶ On the *paragone* of art and nature in Pliny, see Carey, 2003, 105-111; and in Petrarch, Pozzi, 1979. See also Aymonino, 2015, 30-31; Kemp, 1995; Land, 1994, 3-24; Panofsky, 1960, 19-21.

¹³⁷ Winckelmann, 2006, 323; Barkan, 1999, 194-195; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 313.

embodiment of long tradition. Through Michelangelo's decision not to restore the *Torso*, the fragmentary condition of antiquity was confronted and, in a sense, canonised.¹³⁸

What does the anomaly of the *Belvedere Torso* reveal to us, then, about the Renaissance view of the classical past? Restoration, as I have already proposed, itself constituted a creative and self-conscious reaction to the brokenness of classical statuary.¹³⁹ Arguably, the impulse behind Michelangelo's refusal was not fundamentally different.¹⁴⁰ Restoration and refusal to restore were similarly motivated by the expressiveness of the fragment, even if their material consequences were different – the former redeeming the fragment into a conjectural whole (compensating for arbitrary losses with arbitrary new additions), and the second leaving it as a suggestive vestige. As Barkan writes, an equivocation between the part and the whole is not only characteristic of Michelangelo's own sculpture, but reflects a wider ambivalence in Renaissance culture about the nature of the classical:

If Michelangelo is the legendary figure who authorizes both the restoration of ancient fragments and the refusal to restore, if the modern and complete Bacchus, which will after all turn out to be one of the few statues Michelangelo finishes, can be rendered as a fragment [in a drawing after the sculpture by Marten van Heemskerck] while the proverbially fragmentary Torso can be represented as partially restored, that is because the culture in which these works find themselves is radically undecided about the relative merits of ancient and modern, of fragmentary and complete, and because it is sentenced to remain on the cusp rather than to decide.¹⁴¹

When we come to consider the receptions of the *Torso* in Renaissance art, the cultural “indecision” described by Barkan might also be interpreted as a productive ambivalence. Drawings and paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries show the *Torso* in varying states of brokenness, ranging from true-to-life depictions to fanciful impressions of the statue in a more complete (or entirely complete) state, to translations of the statue's anatomy into

¹³⁸ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 193, 196-197, 207.

¹³⁹ Cf. Howard, 1990, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Michelangelo's refusal to restore the *Torso* may not have been as outright as has been claimed: “in the early eighteenth century visitors to Florence were shown a wax model belonging to the Grand Duke which, it was claimed, was the project [Michelangelo] had made to restore the statue had he lived longer – or had he been asked, depending on who told the story.” Haskell and Penny, 1981, 312, and n. 21. On Michelangelo's restorations, see Barkan, 1999, 204. Symonds, 2002 (1893), 154, records the rumour that Michelangelo helped to restore the *Laocoön*.

¹⁴¹ Barkan, 1999, 204.

altogether new compositions.¹⁴² In contrast to the artistic receptions of the *Venus de Milo*, which, as we have seen, generally emphasise the statue's losses, responses to the *Torso* equivocate more finely between the fragment and the reconstituted whole.

This is clear even from a brief set of examples. Giovanni Antonio da Brescia's engraving of *The Belvedere Torso with Legs and Feet, as Hercules* (c. 1500-20; fig. 58) endows the figure with legs, but leaves the head and arms missing (albeit with smaller and re-angled stumps).¹⁴³ Loss and reparation are more subtly balanced in the chalk studies of Hendrick Goltzius (figs. 59-60).¹⁴⁴ These acknowledge the *Torso*'s incompleteness – depicting the facets left by its missing limbs – while also imbuing it with a sense of robust corporeality, through warm flesh tones and an illusion of suppleness. In the next section of this chapter, I will argue that such a conflation of fragmentary form and fleshly content is a key characteristic of the Renaissance body in art. Looser adaptations such as Michelangelo's *ignudi* in the Sistine Chapel (figs. 61-62) integrate the fragment into a Christianised *tableau vivant*; while as we have seen, Michelangelo's sculpture turns the incompleteness of classical statuary into an aestheticizing strategy (most famously in the *Slaves* at the Accademia, Florence; fig. 63).¹⁴⁵ When the *Torso* is reconstructed and animated in this way, it often assumes new shapes and guises to the point where its 'influence' can only be a matter of conjecture.¹⁴⁶ Mediated through new artworks, the ancient fragment might be regarded variously as a static vestige (a metonymic emblem of a lost totality) and as a 'blank canvas' for imaginative projection and restoration (a cypher to be subsumed into new totalities, as in the case of Michelangelo's *ignudi*).¹⁴⁷ But the opposition is rarely clear-cut; in many instances, it may be traced within the same work.

Different strategies of emulation, adaptation or recreation, such as those sketched above, reveal a variety of attitudes towards the classical past. The *Torso* came to encapsulate the way in Renaissance culture was predicated simultaneously on admiration for antiquity as a lost totality, and on an understanding of the plasticity of the classical tradition.¹⁴⁸ Artists played

¹⁴² On renderings of the *Torso* see Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 37, 92-93, 118-120, 199-203; Smith, 2015, 175-181; Barkan, 1999, 191-201; Schwinn, 1973, 24-37; Andr  n, 1952, 12-14.

¹⁴³ Zucker, 1980, 78, no. 5; Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 92-93; Barkan, 1999, 193-194; Andr  n, 1952, 3, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 118-120, no. 8; Barkan, 1999, 193.

¹⁴⁵ Schwinn, 1973, 24-37. See n. 84. On the *Slaves*, see *inter alia* de Tolnay, 1975, 77-85.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Anne Varick Lauder's remark that the pose of Baccio Bandinelli in a self-portrait of 1548 "might, in fact, refer to the *Belvedere Torso*, as 'restored' in an engraving by Giovanni Antonio da Brescia". Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 93.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 206; Howard, 1990, 19-23.

¹⁴⁸ Panofsky, 1960, 113. Cf. Chapter 1, n. 35. For a comparable sentiment see Winckelmann, 2006, 431.

with the ‘openness’ that resulted from the *Torso*’s fragmentary condition – and yet the allure of the *Torso*’s ‘openness’ (its freedom from authorship, provenance or subject) has always gone hand in hand with a desire to define or fix its identity.¹⁴⁹ It was first identified as Hercules (owing to its brawny physique and the animal’s skin on which it is seated), and as less heroic heroes such as Ajax contemplating suicide, the Titan Prometheus, or the wounded or exiled Philoctetes – an interpretation that accords well with the status of the physical object, physically damaged and ‘exiled’ from its original context.¹⁵⁰ The monster Polyphemus and, more recently, the satyr Marsyas have also been suggested: in these cases, imperfection is recast as alterity.¹⁵¹ As an unidentifiable body, the *Torso* is an identikit hero, worthy of admiration, horror, or pity as viewers have seen fit.

I have argued that in the Renaissance, the *Torso* came to be venerated for, and defined by, its combination of recognisable form and elusive content. In the centuries since, it has continued to be recognised as a classical icon while in another sense evading recognition.¹⁵²

Immediately familiar to artists in the Renaissance (and later) as a classical masterpiece, the *Torso* was also open to being imaginatively adapted or translated into new contexts. In this respect, it came to function as metaphor for the classical tradition itself.¹⁵³

And yet this fundamental idea of the *Torso* as a classical topos, analogous to tradition, is not merely a Renaissance ‘way of seeing’ classical antiquity. Unsurprisingly, it is a characteristic of Winckelmann’s famous ecphrasis of 1759, as well as his subsequent description of the *Torso* in *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (*History of the Art of Antiquity*) in 1764.¹⁵⁴ In the former, he conjectures:

¹⁴⁹ On the ascription of modern names to classical statues, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, xic-xv. On shifting identifications, see *ibid.*, 104; Tronzo, 2009, 46; Barkan, 1999, 124-126; Wünsche, 1998a. Cf. Rodin’s application of realist and symbolic titles to the same figures: Elsen, 1981c, 144-145.

¹⁵⁰ Barkan, 1999, 192; Grafton *et al.*, 2010, 123.

¹⁵¹ Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, 167; Grafton, *et al.*, 2010. On Marsyas, see Säflund, 1976; Andrén, 1952, 18; and on Polyphemus, Andrén, 1952, 17-18; cf. Sauer, 1894.

¹⁵² Since the nineteenth century, the eminence of the *Torso* has dimmed owing to its lack of a find spot or other data. For all that Winckelmann wanted to date it to the third century BC (Winckelmann, 2006, 323-324; Marvin, 2008, 118; Brilliant, 2000b, 270), it is probably a ‘study’ of an older artwork – a Roman version of a Greek sculpture, or one deliberately made in the outmoded style of the Hellenistic period. On the inherent uprootedness of Roman art, see Barkan, 1999, 129-133.

¹⁵³ Barkan, 1999, 189; see also Marvin, 2008, 135, on discussions of the *Torso* as a paradigm of classical art by the Select Committee appointed to consider the purchase of the Parthenon Sculptures.

¹⁵⁴ Winckelmann, 2013a, 143-147; Winckelmann, 2006, 323 (cf. *ibid.*, 202-203). See also Herder, 2002 (1778), 70, 75; and on Herder’s appeal to touch: Slaney, 2016, 88-93. On Winckelmann and Art History, see Howard, 1990, 165.

It seems to me that the back that appears bent from lofty reflections forms a head that is occupied with happy memories of its amazing deeds. And as such a head rises full of majesty and wisdom before my eyes, the other missing limbs begin to take shape in my imagination.¹⁵⁵

Winckelmann's imaginative 're-membering' defines how we continue to treat fragments – both as autonomous entities and indices of what is missing.¹⁵⁶ At moments, he seemingly overlooks the *Torso*'s status as a fragment, concentrating intently on the depicted body.¹⁵⁷ But on the other hand, it is the "maltreated and mutilated" form that makes such fanciful speculation upon its content possible.¹⁵⁸ Every part of the body is said to be like a painting, revealing "the complete hero in a specific deed".¹⁵⁹ the analogy closely anticipates Pater and Rodin's appreciations of the broken *Venus*. Winckelmann's rapturous attention to surface appeals similarly to the reader's sense of touch – thus emphasising the physicality and permanence of the fragment, but also its receptivity to modern interpretation. Walter Benjamin, one of the key theorists of modernity, hints at this receptivity when he remarks, of Winckelmann's text, on the "un-classical way he goes over it, part by part and limb by limb. It is no accident that the subject is a torso. In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune."¹⁶⁰ Once again, the fragment seemingly has the capacity to subsume – or stand outside of – history.

Yet this very idea may be found within classical literature. The ambivalence of the fragment for Renaissance artists not only looks forward to Winckelmann, but can equally be traced back to antiquity. At the close of the first book of his 'rhetorical epic' *Bellum civile*, the Roman poet Lucan evokes the image of Pompey's torso, decapitated by assassins and washed up on the sands of Egypt. The image occurs within a prophetic speech uttered by a divinely-inspired Roman matron, who imagines herself guided through the scenes of the future Civil War by the god Apollo. In her ecstatic vision, the headless and marooned torso acquires new

¹⁵⁵ Winckelmann, 2013a, 146. On the Winckelmann and the *Torso* see Prettejohn, 2012, 15-17, 20, 25; Potts, 2006, 34; Potts, 1994, 179-180.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Bann, 1989b, 105.

¹⁵⁷ For Porter, Winckelmann's "classicism was a self-willed illusion": *ibid*, 2006, 26. See also Howard, 1990, 165-166. Cf. Potts, 1994, on the contrariness of Winckelmann's response: *ibid*, 179-180.

¹⁵⁸ Winckelmann, 2013a, 144.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 145.

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin, 1998, 176. The appeal to touch is reflected in Jean-Leon Gérôme's *Michelangelo Being Shown the Belvedere Torso* (1839): Dahesh Museum of Art, New York: Doyle, 2010, 7-21.

fictive and symbolic possibilities. As the classicist Emanuele Narducci has observed: “Just as Pharsalus and Philippi become a single scene of a single civil war for her, the recognition of that formless torso immediately leads the reader to an intertextual recognition: the memory of the lines in book 2 of the *Aeneid* that describe Priam’s body washed up by the waves on the beach at Troy”:¹⁶¹

*Hunc, ego fluminea deformis truncus harena
qui iacet, agnosco.*

“This man
Who lies, a shapeless trunk, on the sandy bank – I know him.”¹⁶²

*iacet ingens litore truncus, / avulsumque umeris caput et sine
nomine corpus.*

“A great trunk lies on the shore, / A head torn from the
shoulders, a body without a name.”¹⁶³

Through its ranging and interconnecting references, the prophetic speech of Lucan’s matron dramatises the process by which the broken and displaced body becomes, in art or literature, a recognisable and transferable motif. Places, times and people merge in her ecstatic vision, in such a way as to dramatise Lucan’s own intertextual and reflexive poetic voice.¹⁶⁴ The matron’s ‘identification’ of the torso (686, *agnosco* – in seeming contrast with Virgil’s “body without a name”) does not resolve its identity, but rather confers on it multiple identities – layered and interconnected – in the same way as Apollonios’s signature on the *Torso* makes it all the more enigmatic.¹⁶⁵ Within this associative mode of envisioning (Lucan’s, and – by extension – that of his prophetic bacchante), the torso becomes an ‘open text’.¹⁶⁶ The speech’s power rests on the matron’s nod to the Virgilian precedent, and in turn on the reader’s recognition of the allusion. Through this intertextual gloss, Pompey’s torso is written into the ‘megatext’ of literary tradition, so as to become a vector of multiple meanings.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Narducci, 2007, 392. Cf. Hinds, 1998, 8-10.

¹⁶² *Bellum civile* 1.685-6. Trans. Jane Wilson Joyce: Lucan, 1993, 27.

¹⁶³ Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.554-5. Trans. C. Day Lewis: Virgil, 1952.

¹⁶⁴ On intertextuality, see Chapter 1, n. 49.

¹⁶⁵ On the layers of meaning in *agnosco*, see Hinds, 1998, 9.

¹⁶⁶ See Eco, 1979, especially 49-65. Cf. on Eco’s influence on *arte povera*, Criticos, 2001, 67.

¹⁶⁷ On the concept of a ‘megatext’ permeated by “subconscious patterns or ‘deep structures’”, see Segal, 1983, 176. Comparable is T.S. Eliot’s concept of tradition: Eliot, 1919. Cf. Assmann 2007, especially 20-22. On “tradition as an imaginary context”, see Budelmann and Haubold, 2008, 17-18. Cf. *ibid.*, 23-25.

The extract from Lucan shows that the Renaissance ‘way of seeing’ the *Belvedere Torso* – as both a paradigm of the classical and an open text – is not just a symptom of classical reception. An equivalent way of seeing existed in antiquity.¹⁶⁸ While Lucan’s torso is a literary conceit, and imagines a corpse rather than a sculpture, it nonetheless provides a vivid analogy for the Renaissance conception of the *Torso*, whereby fragmentation both defines the object and, in another sense, liberates it from definition.¹⁶⁹ The underlying idea of the body in pieces being an essentially classical trope, and by the same token multivalent (summoning parallels from throughout history), is key to this chapter: in the case of contemporary bodies in pieces, viewers are again expected to recognise in the same fashion as Lucan’s matron – glimpsing in those bodies a longer tradition of fragmentation.

The fact that Lucan’s torso is a corpse rather than a marble demonstrates how *sparagmos* is a live theme within this tradition. The history of the body in pieces is not simply a story of physical breakage, but incorporates thematic and narrative instances of dismemberment. Lucan tells the story of a real body that has been torn to pieces, seeing in that real body the makings of an artistic motif. In the next section, we will see how this alternation between (or conflation of) the sculptural body and the real body became a defining quality of Renaissance art. We will see how narratives of violence have worked in tandem with the gaps and contingencies of material culture, to help make the body in pieces a defining aspect of the classical tradition in art.

5. *Mythical ‘bodies in pieces’ in Renaissance art*

So far in this chapter, I have shown how fragmentation of the body became an aesthetic strategy in the hands of Modernist artists, and how the novelty of that strategy – seemingly breaking away from classical models – was not antithetical to the classical. This is because fragmentation itself was a distinguishing and powerful attribute of antiquity by the nineteenth century, as attested by the celebrity of the *Venus de Milo*. The example of the *Belvedere Torso* has shown that, even in an era which favoured restoration, fragmentation was

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Pliny’s view of the broken Colossus of Rhodes: *iacens quoque miraculo est* (“a marvel, even lying on its side”): *HN*, 34.18.41.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 204.

understood as a criterion of the classical past, capable of expressing something beyond mere loss.

While broken classical statues were being hauled from the ground in the Renaissance and contemporary observers were trying to understand what they stood for, artists were also depicting myths of ‘broken bodies’.¹⁷⁰ From the sixteenth century, mythological stories of violence gradually increased in currency, with the tales of Orpheus, Actaeon, Marsyas, Prometheus and Tityus appearing in drawings, paintings and decorative arts.¹⁷¹ These were stories in which Greek and Roman gods show their power in their capacity to tear humans apart. This tearing is yet another way in which the body in pieces has become a classical trope in western art – in depictions of ancient myths of bodies divided, flayed or otherwise assailed.

Well into the nineteenth century, the classical body in pieces finds narrative manifestations as well as material ones. But how discrete are these manifestations? In this section, I will argue that thematised violence and material fragmentation are anything but distinct when we come to consider the sum effects of a work of art. This argument builds upon Nochlin’s equation of material brokenness with acts of bodily dismemberment and violence in the French Revolution, but it also seeks to move beyond the localised timeframe of her essay.¹⁷² Far from being a shocking innovation of Quinn’s ‘blood head’, the ambiguity between living body and sculptural figure is arguably a pervasive characteristic of western history painting.¹⁷³ The marble and bronze bodies of antiquity are repeatedly translated, whether faithfully or loosely, into narrative situations (we have already seen how Michelangelo reanimated the *Torso* in his depiction of *The Last Judgment*).

Scenes of mythic violence throw this familiar interplay into sharp relief. By thematising the body in pieces, they evoke the vulnerable surface of the body as much as its frangible ‘sculptural’ form.¹⁷⁴ In order to examine further the relationship between material and bodily

¹⁷⁰ On the dialectic in Renaissance art between sculptural “larger than life figures” and “Albertian historia” (i.e. figural types versus narrative scenes), see Barkan, 1999, 155. Cf. Warburg’s association of *Kunst und Erinnerung* in the transmission of images: Brilliant, 2000b, 273; Forster, 1976.

¹⁷¹ See n. 9. On scenes of punishment, see Bull, 2005, 144-148. On Orpheus, see Warburg, 1999c, 553-555.

¹⁷² Nochlin, 1994, 8-23.

¹⁷³ Compare Rodin’s description of the *Venus de Milo* in terms of its surface play of light: Rodin, 2011, 412.

¹⁷⁴ Explicit depictions of dismemberment remained rare until later centuries: Bull, 227; cf. Puff, 2014, 66. For a nineteenth-century example, see Henri Leopold Lévy’s *The Death of Orpheus* (c. 1870): Art Institute of

fragmentation, I will focus on two celebrated Renaissance images – one of impending *sparagmos* and the other of flaying. In both cases, the body in pieces translates into a narrative theme. The emphasis is on the *process* of destruction, more than the final product or outcome. These two examples are also useful in showing how the close relationship between loss and violence – that is, between the breakable body of classical sculpture and the ‘living’ body of a mythological character – is intrinsic to the artwork’s emotive force.

Dürer’s drawing *The Death of Orpheus* (1494; fig. 64) depicts the episode immortalised in Book 11 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* when the poet’s singing is interrupted by the gang of frenzied maenads who will tear him to pieces.¹⁷⁵ Dürer shows the onset of the attack: two club-wielding women stand over Orpheus, who kneels and cowers beneath a tree, as yet unmaimed. It is the pictorial equivalent to the lines in Ovid describing the point when a maenad “launched her thyrsus straight at the head of the great musician who served Apollo, and the ivy-tipped spear inflicted a bruise *without drawing blood* (7-9, *hastam / vatis Apollinei vocalia misit in ora, / quae follis praesuta notam sine vulnere fecit*).¹⁷⁶ In Dürer’s drawing, this impression of concurrent susceptibility (*notam*) and resilience (*sine vulnere*) is conveyed by Orpheus’s exposed, subdued body. His nakedness makes him vulnerable in comparison with his clothed assailants, but it equally renders him classically sculptural: as he kneels in fear, his cloak falls back to reveal a taut, *contrapposto* abdomen and thighs that are close in appearance to those of the *Belvedere Torso*.¹⁷⁷

What does this dual emphasis on Orpheus’s vulnerable humanity and his sculptural physique achieve? Aby Warburg described the drawing as “possessing an entirely authentic, antique spirit”, one of “intensified physical or psychic expression”.¹⁷⁸ Echoing this, Panofsky claimed that Dürer had achieved an image with “the force of a classic tragedy”, praising the

Chicago: 1977.4 The figure of Pentheus – often linked with Orpheus in literature – remains rare in post-classical art outside of illustrated editions of Ovid: Bull, 2005, 225.

¹⁷⁵ Ovid, *Met.* 11.1-66. Warburg, 1999c, 553-558; Wind, 1939, 214-217; Panofsky, 1955b, 238-239, 242-244, 283-284; Panofsky, 1955d, 32; Rosasco, 1984; Puff, 2006; Puff, 2014; Mills, 2015, 167-175. Warburg identifies an anonymous engraving (c. 1460) from Mantegna’s circle (also at the Hamburger Kunsthalle) as Dürer’s source: Warburg, 1999c, 553; see also Panofsky, 1955d, 32, on the influence of Mantegna’s fresco in the Camera degli Sposi, Mantua (the site for the performance of Poliziano’s *Il Favolo di Orfeo* in 1471); cf. Kosinski, 1989, 17.

¹⁷⁶ *Met.* 11.6-8. Italics mine.

¹⁷⁷ See Warburg, 1999c, 556, on Dürer and the *Apollo Belvedere* (cf. Panofsky, 1995b, 250-255); and Panofsky, 1955d, 32, on the figure’s “beautiful *contrapposto*”.

¹⁷⁸ Warburg, 1999c, 553, 555.

modelling of the maenads' bodies beneath their drapery,¹⁷⁹ and the authenticity of the lyre.¹⁸⁰ Taken together, these statements imply that the drawing's classicism, or its "antique spirit", is not simply a matter of statuesque figures and antique props. It extends to the psychological charge of the *in medias res* narrative.¹⁸¹ Crucially, Orpheus's classically-styled body is imperiled – soon to be torn apart. The cloak that falls off his shoulders is a proleptic signal, effecting a strange dislocation of head from body.

There are several other respects in which Dürer captures the nuances of Ovid's story, thereby impelling us to see this scene as an unresolved event – part of a longer narrative sequence. A line written on a ribbon in the treetop reads *Orfeus, der erst puseran* ("Orpheus, the first pederast") – an allusion to the cause of violence in Ovid (it was supposedly this proclivity which provoked the maenads).¹⁸² A putto-like child shown fleeing the scene reinforces the point.¹⁸³ With this cameo player, Dürer captures not only a salacious detail of Ovid's poem but also the tale's underlying tragicomic mood: the death of the bard in the *Metamorphoses* is at once melancholic and absurd.¹⁸⁴ The overhanging foliage meanwhile reminds us of Orpheus's proximity to nature. Balancing the analeptic detail of the ribbon, the tree anticipates the way in which nature will mourn his death.

Ovid's story is thereby collapsed into a monoscenic composition; but as a consequence, Dürer's statuesque figures are set within a still-unfolding story. It is the drawing's combination of sculptural robustness and volatile narrative mood (anticipating Orpheus's violent death) that underpins its pathos. It is almost as if the broken figure of the *Torso* has been animated in a narrative sequence and regained its missing pieces only for the restored body to be threatened once again with dismemberment.¹⁸⁵ To extend the point, it might be noted that the maenads – who are supposed to have ripped Orpheus limb from limb – are here wielding blunt clubs (a notable departure from Ovid's text), as if Orpheus is a brittle effigy to

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Alberti, 2004, 81.

¹⁸⁰ Replacing the lute shown in Dürer's source, an engraving after Mantegna. Panofsky, 1955d, 32. On the classicism of Dürer's bodies, see *ibid.*, 35. Cf. Wind, who interprets the drawing as "mock-heroic": *ibid.*, 1939, 214.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Warburg, 1999c, 556: "Antiquity came to Dürer by way of Italian art, not merely as a Dionysian stimulant but as a source of Apollonian clarity." Cf. Nietzsche, 2000 (1872).

¹⁸² Mills, 2015, 172; Puff 2014, 70-71; Puff, 2006, 81.

¹⁸³ Edgar Wind interprets this detail as mocking Orpheus's lofty status: *ibid.*, 1939, 214. See also Mills, 2015, 170.

¹⁸⁴ On the drawing's ambivalence, see especially Puff, 2006, 80.

¹⁸⁵ It is unlikely that Dürer knew of the *Torso*, but his familiarity with ancient sculptural types, through Italian painting, is well attested: Panofsky, 1955b, 236-255, 275-285; Warburg, 1999c.

be hammered, rather than torn, to pieces.¹⁸⁶ By interleaving material damage and an act of violence, sculptural typology and literary narrative, Dürer allows twin conceptions of the body – statuesque and living – to come into play at the same time. *Sparagmos* is reimagined as breakage.

This has two important consequences. First, the murder of Orpheus acquires a subtext of material destruction or iconoclasm that helps to lift Dürer's visual rendering of the story above the level of mundane brutality: a harrowing event is cast in the lineaments of high art, and in this respect, the classicising style of Dürer's figures has the same elevating effect as Ovid's poetic meter and diction.¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, there is a sense in which art itself is being assailed along with the body of Orpheus. The idea is made all the more powerful by the fact that Orpheus represents a kind of proto-artist or personification of art.¹⁸⁸ (Dürer's drawing has itself been read as an elliptical self-portrait, a reflection on the fate of the artist).¹⁸⁹ Secondly, the mythological story gives dramatic expression to the act of breakage – it is conceived as something beyond a passive condition or undesired outcome of history. The iconoclastic act is an unwittingly productive one: the maenads seek to destroy beauty, but in their destruction, beauty is only reinforced (compare how the *Venus de Milo*'s fragmentation – synonymous with its beauty – has elicited desire). Orpheus's lyre is there in the foreground, pointedly reminding us that he will keep singing, even once his head has been severed.¹⁹⁰

While Dürer's drawing merges the human body with the statuesque body – inviting us to equate bodily dismemberment with material breakage – other scenes of myth construct a more jarring interplay. My second example, Jusepe de Ribera's 1637 painting *Apollo and Marsyas* (fig. 65), shows how sculptural typology might sit more incongruously with mythological theme.¹⁹¹ The story filtered into Renaissance art through a wealth of ancient visual and literary sources, and is most famously told by Ovid in Book 6 of the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁹² In this instance, the victim's body is not fragmented as if it were a statue, but stripped from itself piece by piece.

¹⁸⁶ On the non-classical elements of Dürer's drawing, see Puff, 2014, 68.

¹⁸⁷ On iconoclasm, see Kolrud and Prusac, 2014, especially 2-9.

¹⁸⁸ Kosinski, 1989, xi-xii, 1-48.

¹⁸⁹ Puff, 2014, 74.

¹⁹⁰ On the topos of the severed head uttering sounds, Mills, 2013, especially 32-34.

¹⁹¹ Pérez Sánchez and Spinosa, 1992, 119, no. 41; Spinosa, 2003, 120-122, 300, no. A163; Du Gué Trapier, 1952, 130-135.

¹⁹² Bull, 2005, 301. *Metamorphoses*, 382-400.

The figures in Ribera's painting are again reminiscent of classical statues.¹⁹³ Ribera depicts the satyr sprawled and screaming beneath Apollo, arms out-flung and head tipping back, while the punitive god rises serenely over him.¹⁹⁴ As in many pictures of the myth, we witness the horrifying inception of the punishment,¹⁹⁵ a moment already popularised by ancient sculpture, for example the statues of Marsyas owned by Lorenzo and Cosimo de' Medici.¹⁹⁶ Like Orpheus, the characters of Apollo and Marsyas are, in one sense, metaphors for art itself – or at least for opposing 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' conceptions of art – and in Ribera's painting, the metaphor comes close to being literalised.¹⁹⁷ The two figures suggest statues brought to life – giant, heavily contoured, gesticulating masses that might almost have been hewn or modelled.¹⁹⁸ The blocks which lie on the ground beside Marsyas, identical in colour to his felled body, coax the impression that he is made of the same matter. Though fragmented by drapery, Apollo is composed and coherent in his posture, whereas Marsyas's flailing legs look dislocated and almost inhuman – an extension almost of the tree root. The sprawling Marsyas might just as easily have been adapted from a view of the *Torso* lying on its back, such as Marten van Heemskerck's first view of the sculpture (c. 1532-36; fig. 66).

Sculptural forms are vividly present, then, within Ribera's mythological scene; and so, inevitably, is sculptural fragmentation – even if it is not the literal kind presaged in Dürer's drawing. Marsyas's body – shaded off and fractured by Ribera's tenebrist style, so that his legs virtually disappear below the knee – is a fragment. Far from being a Modernist invention, fragmentation as a compositional strategy is anticipated within the narratives and aesthetics of paintings from the Renaissance onwards. The fragmentary state of classical statuary transmutes into a widespread atmospheric device in Renaissance and Baroque paintings, where chiaroscuro lighting leaves fractured portions of the naked body illuminated like marble chunks.¹⁹⁹ The shadowed areas of Ribera's canvas effect a fragmentation of the

¹⁹³ On Ribera's study of classical art in Rome, see Pérez Sánchez and Spinosa, 1992, 196; Brown, 1973, 121. On his uses of the *Belvedere Torso*, see Farina, 2014, 65, 149.

¹⁹⁴ The composition is indebted to Melchior Meier's print *Apollo, Marsyas, and the Judgment of Midas*, (1582): Bull, 2005, 304-305.

¹⁹⁵ Wyss, 1996, 83-144.

¹⁹⁶ Vasari, 1987a, 236; Rubinstein, 1998; Fusco and Corti, 2006.

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, 2000 (1872). Cf. Shapiro, 2003, 74-105; Eagleton, 2003, especially 50-56; Paglia, 1990, 72-98; Foucault, 2001, 103-108; and on Foucault's uses of Nietzsche, Shapiro, 2003; Turner, 2008, 135-137. On Dionysian *sparagmos*, see Paglia, 1990, 95-98. Cf. Warburg, 1999c, 556. Cf. Sawday, 1995, 185.

¹⁹⁸ This elision has its basis in academic training: pupils learned to copy 'flat' images, then sculptures, and finally live models: Aymonino, 2015, 32-33, 44-45.

¹⁹⁹ Compare Théodore Géricault's paintings of dismembered bodies: Nochlin, 1994, 16-23; Rosenthal, 1997.

body that is akin to the breakages inflicted by time on actual statues; and the concealment of Marsyas's animal legs also has the important effect of magnifying his humanity and heightening the realism of the scene. Long before Rodin, then, Ribera and other painters were actively deconstructing the body in ways that evoked the broken statues of antiquity and yet aimed at a 'modern' mode of naturalism.

And yet, aside from its statuesque and 'fractured' forms, the scene offers a parallel – and different – way of thinking about the body in pieces. The satyr's body is a vulnerable fleshly surface that may be stripped from itself: Apollo is shown drawing open a wound in his lower leg. (In another version of the myth, Ribera depicts Apollo unpeeling the skin around Marsyas's leg; fig. 68).²⁰⁰ This peeling of the body from itself is at strange odds with the stony solidity of Marsyas's frame (compare how the bloody, skinless appearance of Quinn's *Self* sits uneasily with the statuesque form of the bust). That sculptural exterior is proven false, in contrast to the equivalence between human body and classical sculpture in Dürer's drawing.

The subtler method of violence, therefore, entails a subtler comprehension of the body, as a layered organism made of tissue and blood. Within this more naturalistic conception, however, there is once again a metaphor for art's own processes. Bowing over Marsyas, yet separated by a band of fluttering drapery, Apollo draws open the wound as if with a paintbrush. His arms seem to mime the playing of the violin which he has discarded on the ground. The act of dissection is a virtuoso feat as much as a violent one, and Marsyas's afflicted body can be seen as a painterly construct – layered and peelable – as much as a sculptural one. Art historians have written of Ribera's Marsyas in terms that closely echo those of Pater and Rodin (and before them, Winckelmann) in relation to ancient statuary, expressing fascination with surface texture and its creation of an illusion of flesh: "He developed a technique in which the marks and lines traced by his coarse brushes in the wet paint create an exciting surface texture and intensify the naturalistic illusion [...] The topography of the human flesh was for Ribera the mirror of the human spirit, and by baring the nerves at the very surface of the skin he makes us acutely sensitive to the inner life of his heroes."²⁰¹ As in the story of Orpheus, dissection of the body is envisioned as a perversely creative act. And so Ribera's Marsyas is both broken statue and bleeding surface (soon to

²⁰⁰ Spinosa, 2003, 300, no. A164. Du Gué Trapier, 1952, 135-136, attributes it to a pupil.

²⁰¹ Held and Posner, 1971, 85.

become an *écorché*). His body offsets the materiality of sculpture with the illusionism of painting. It is important to note that these effects are equally discernible in Christian images of martyrdom – this chapter might also have used Ribera’s *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (1644) as a test case: again, the classicism of the fragmentary body complements, and merges with, its later contexts and associations. In the final section of this chapter, I will return to the story of Marsyas to show how these effects belong equally to Quinn’s *Self*, and thus how the contemporary artwork might be interpreted through the ‘lens’ of Ovid’s story.

The works of Dürer and Ribera have demonstrated how artists in the Renaissance and after reanimated the fragments of the classical past, so as to present ‘real’ bodies in sculptural lineaments and vice versa. The dynamic between sculptural form and animate content makes the body in pieces, to paraphrase Warburg, both “antique [in] spirit” and psychically intense.²⁰² And yet that dynamic plays out in different ways, reflecting the different forms of violence that ancient myths relate. Dürer’s image achieves a smooth convergence of the sculptural body and real body; while in Ribera’s painting, the two conceptions sit more uneasily.

Such twofold presentations of the body are not in themselves unusual: everywhere in the canon of western painting, nude and semi-nude bodies may be likened to classical sculptures or fragments. But images of violence are different in that the hair’s breadth between living body and art object assumes peculiar intensity. Even where the assailed body remains intact (or predominantly intact, as in the case of Ribera’s Marsyas), the mythological narrative animates ancient sculpture in the context of a violent story, and thus presages its return to a state of disintegration. Drawn and painted narratives of mythological violence exhibit an ambivalent movement between corporeality and objecthood, totality and rupture. In this way, they establish the classical body as an ambivalent trope – almost inherently broken or breakable.²⁰³

As artists re-encountered the literal remains of antiquity from the fifteenth century onwards, therefore, the body in pieces as a classical topos was also manifested through the *sparagmos*

²⁰² Warburg, op. cit.

²⁰³ Cf. Barkan, 1999, 121-122.

stories of ancient authors. And yet the impulse to play with the distinctions between breakage and *sparagmos* is not exclusive to the Renaissance. The same impulse may be traced within the Greco-Roman literary corpus – especially in writing about the long-standing practice of *damnatio memoriae*, whereby a disgraced potentate’s images and effigies were systematically destroyed or reworked.²⁰⁴ These accounts of real-life occurrences are far removed, in content and context, from the realm of myth as visualised by artists in the Renaissance. And yet by focusing on two passages from different ancient historians, I will show how the practice of *damnatio memoriae* was predicated on the same equivalences, or contrasts, between artistic and real bodies as I have identified in the works of Dürer and Ribera.

It is perhaps unsurprising that classical myth abounded in stories of bodies in pieces, when we consider how routine it was in the ancient world for bodies – both sculpted and real – to be violently attacked. Juvenal’s *Satire* on the ‘Vanity of Human Wishes’, describes the *damnatio memoriae* of the unpopular Roman official Lucius Aelius Sejanus as an *exemplum* in a lengthy diatribe against overweening power.²⁰⁵ Juvenal’s passage is a vivid example of the tendency to equate a sculptural representation with its real-life subject. He recounts the burning of Sejanus’s effigy after his assassination in AD 31, in terms that first confuse, and then decisively conflate, Sejanus’s statue and actual body.

quosdam praecipiat subiecta potentia magnae
invidiae, mergit longa atque insignis honorum
pagina, descendunt statuae restemque sequuntur,
ipsas deinde rotas bigarum inpacta securis
caedit et inmeritis franguntur crura caballis;
iam strident ignes, iam follibus atque caminis
ardet adoratum populo caput et crepat ingens
Seianus, deinde ex facie toto orbe secunda
fiunt urceoli pelves sartago matellae.
pone domi laurus, duc in Capitolia magnum
cretatumque bovem! Seianus ducitur unco
spectandus, gaudent omnes: ‘quae labra, quis illi
vultus erat! numquam, si quid mihi credis, amavi
hunc hominem, sed quo cecidit sub crimine? [...]’²⁰⁶

Some men are thrown headlong by the envy produced by their
overweening power; they are destroyed by the long and glorious

²⁰⁴ Prusac, 2014, 42-44, 52; Fejfer, 2008, 377-380; Vout, 2008; Flower, 2006; Varner, 2005; Varner, 2004, especially 1-20; Stewart, 1999.

²⁰⁵ On Sejanus, see Flower, 2006, 169-175; Varner, 2004, 92-93.

²⁰⁶ *Satire* X, 56-69.

litany of their honours: their statues fall, yielding to the rope. The axe shatters their chariot wheels into bits, and breaks the legs of blameless horses. Already the flames are hissing, and amid the roar of furnace and bellows, the head of mighty Sejanus, adored by the mob, is burning and crackling, and from the face, which was second in the entire world, are being fashioned pitchers, pots, pans and chamber pots. Do away with laurel-wreaths over your doors! Lead a mighty chalked bull to the Capitol! Sejanus is being dragged along by a hook for all to see; everyone is rejoicing! “What a lip he had, what a face!” “I never liked the man, it you’ll believe me. But on what charge was he condemned? [...]”

The burning head and figure of the “mighty Sejanus” (62-63, *ardet ... caput et crepat ingens / Seianus*) are pictured in a fire, with no discrimination between man and effigy (62, *adoratum populo*, “adored by the people”, could refer to either, or indeed both). Confirmation that this a statue rather than a man comes indirectly, from the image of its reclaimed metal being turned into “pitchers, pots, pans, and chamber pots” (64, *fiunt urceoli pelves sartago matellae*). Sejanus’s fall from grace and violent assassination are concomitant with, almost indistinguishable from, the degradation of his statue into tableware.²⁰⁷ In the following image, the elision between Sejanus and his likeness is all the more pointed: Sejanus is being dragged along by a hook for all to see (66-67, *Seianus ducitur unco / spectandus*). Does this refer to his actual corpse – thrown onto the Gemonian stairs and torn apart by a mob – or to his deposed statue?²⁰⁸ In terms that only deepen the ambiguity, Juvenal imagines spectators marvelling at the man (or his statue’s) features: (67-68, *quae labra, quis illi / vultus erat*, “what lips he had, and what a face!”). The potency of the image derives from the fact that the reader is impelled to see the man in his statue; the analogy between the dismembering of Sejanus and the destruction of his image is so close as to become an equivalence.

Procopius’s *Historia arcana* (*Anecdota*) on the life of Justinian again refers to the practice of *damnatio memoriae*. In this case, the equation of the broken human body with its artistic double is more literal and macabre. The author describes Justinian as looking much like Domitian, explaining that there is only one surviving statue of Domitian (a victim of *damnatio memoriae*) left in the Roman Empire. This portrait was requested, he explains, by

²⁰⁷ Nero suffered similar *damnatio memoriae*: Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, 52. Cf. Cicero on Demetrius’s ruin in Athens: *De finibus*, 5.76.

²⁰⁸ Juvenal inclines his reader towards the former interpretation: “Would you choose to wear the bordered robe of the man now being dragged along the streets [...]?” (99, *huius qui trahitur praetextam sumere mavis*).

the emperor's widow as a favour from the Senate, and it is from this that the likeness between the emperors may be deduced:

ἡ δὲ τοῦτο μόνον ἰκέτευε, τό τε Δομετιανοῦ σῶμα λαβοῦσα
θάψαι καὶ μίαν αὐτῷ ἀναθεῖναι εἰκόνα χαλκῆν, ὅποι ἂν ἐθέλοι.
καὶ ἡ μὲν βουλὴ ξυνεχώρει ταῦτα: ἡ δὲ γυνὴ τῆς ἀπανθρωπίας
τῶν τὸν ἄνδρα κρεουργησάντων ἀπολεῖψαι βουλομένη μνημεῖα
τῷ ὀπισθεν χρόνῳ ἐπενόει τάδε. τὰ Δομετιανοῦ ξυλλεξαμένη
κρέα, ξυνθεῖσά τε αὐτὰ ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς καὶ ἐναρμοσαμένη ἐς
ἄλληλα κατέρραψε μὲν τὸ σῶμα ὅλον, τοῖς δὲ πλάσταις
ἐνδειξαμένη ἐν εἰκόνι χαλκῇ τὸ πάθος ἀπομιμεῖσθαι τοῦτο
ἐκέλευεν. οἱ μὲν οὖν τεχνῖται τὴν εἰκόνα εὐθὺς ἐποίουν.
λαβοῦσα δὲ ἡ γυνὴ ἔστησεν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐς τὸ Καπιτώλιον φερούσης
ἀνόδου ἐν δεξιᾷ ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς ἐνταῦθα ἰόντι, εἰδός τε τὸ
Δομετιανοῦ καὶ τὸ πάθος δηλοῦσαν ἐς τότε τοῦ χρόνου.

She asked only this: to set up in [Domitian's] memory one brass image, wherever she might desire. To this the Senate agreed. Now the lady, wishing to leave a memorial to future time of the savagery of those who had butchered her husband, conceived this plan: collecting the pieces of Domitian's body, she joined them accurately together and sewed the body up again into its original semblance. Taking this to the statue makers, she ordered them to produce the miserable form in brass. So the artisans forthwith made the image, and the wife took it, and set it up in the street which leads to the Capitol, on the right hand side as one goes there from the Forum: a monument to Domitian and a revelation of the manner of his death until this day.²⁰⁹

This extract is useful in two respects, First, as in Juvenal, the author establishes an interplay between body and art object – the Flavian emperor's physical butchering takes place against the backdrop of *damnatio memoriae*, as his representations are destroyed. There is again an implied analogy between the destruction of Domitian's body and the obliteration of his statues, as if one precipitated the other.²¹⁰ Secondly, however, this episode shows how such an analogy could be gruesome and incongruous. Procopius relates the detail of the emperor's widow sewing up the pieces of his dismembered corpse as the basis for a posthumous portrait (*eidōs*). Body parts become raw sculptural matter – the prototype for a brass memorial; and a gruesomely real instance of the Roman practice of fusing parts of different statues.²¹¹ In this

²⁰⁹ *Historia arcana (Anecdota)*, 8.17-20. Trans. Richard Atwater: Procopius, 1927.

²¹⁰ Cf. anthropomorphic statues of gods being regarded as the gods themselves: Squire, 2011, 158-160.

²¹¹ Squire, 2011, 153; Barkan, 1999, 121-122; and for an analogy between ancient sculptural reconfigurations and Rodin's practice, Elsen, 1981c, 146.

stitched-up corpse, artwork and subject have become one,²¹² and yet the act of restoration does nothing to conceal the dismemberment the corpse has suffered – its seams, or wounds, are left to show (we are told that the brass image functioned as “a revelation of the manner of his death until this day”). In the following section, I will propose that this story’s strange confluences of body and symbol, wounds and joins, closely accord with the way in which we might read a contemporary artistic ‘body in pieces’.

The extracts from Juvenal and Procopius remind us that material fragmentation is not simply a condition of post-classical ages: within antiquity, artworks were analysed in terms of their actual or potential breakage. Furthermore, they reveal how ancient observers configured the relationship between broken statuary and dismembered bodies. The distinction might be elided or problematised. And so the conceptual underpinnings of the ‘Renaissance’ body in pieces have their basis in antiquity, albeit in a markedly different context.

6. *Sarah Lucas and Marc Quinn through the lens of the classical*

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that fragmentation of the body in art leads us, necessarily, back to antiquity. Although fragmentation might be considered a paradigmatically Modernist gesture, weighing against the tradition of classicising art so hard that it breaks, it is also a defining aspect of the classical corpus. The Modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and the fame of the *Venus de Milo* may be seen as the culmination of a gradually-evolving premium on the fragment. That process is traceable in the Renaissance, during which the classical past came to be conceptualised in terms of its broken remains: fragmentation shifted from being viewed as a negligible accident of history into a metaphor for the classical tradition, and into a formal attribute that might signify beauty, elicit desire, or stimulate new narratives.

The chapter has also demonstrated how the idea of fragmentation extends beyond the material record of antiquity, to encompass myths of bodies torn apart. Through the examples of Dürer and Ribera, we saw that the commonplace ambiguity between sculptural matter and flesh takes on a heightened intensity when the classical body is threatened with – or afflicted

²¹² Compare Alberti’s concept of creating beauty out of “excellent parts [...] from the most beautiful bodies”: *ibid.*, 1972, 99. Cf. Chapter 2, n. 101.

by – violence: within scenes of bodies fractured and flayed, artists are able to conflate, or mediate between, tropes of sculptural form and vulnerable corporeality. In the course of describing the artistic receptions of the *Belvedere Torso* and Renaissance depictions of myth, I have shown ultimately how the appeal and ambiguity of a body in pieces were anticipated in ancient texts.

To what extent do the broken bodies of contemporary art derive their power and meaning from older manifestations of the body in pieces? Through corporeal fragmentation and eroded surfaces, Lucas and Quinn's works solicit new meanings in the same way as the *Venus de Milo* and the *Torso*. Like Pompey's torso in Lucan's *Bellum civile*, they beckon artistic (or literary) parallels by dint of being incomplete. Certain of these parallels may be unforeseen. Unlike Rodin, whom we saw responding in some sense to the *Venus de Milo*, art of the 1990s was rarely aiming at direct classical reference.²¹³ But in the very act of recognising the multivalence of the fragmentary or timeworn body, these artists acknowledge its classical identity. Indeed, that reflexive acknowledgment mirrors the response of Lucan's matron when she sees the torso on the beach, assigning it greater meaning than merely that of a shorn body part. The embrace of fragmentation by Lucas, Quinn and other contemporary artists sets their work within an established aesthetic and conceptual framework – that of Rodin and his Modernist successors, but equally that of Rodin's predecessors in the Renaissance (chiefly Michelangelo) and the broken bodies of the classical canon, and ultimately of ancient writers including Ovid, Juvenal and Procopius.

In the case of Lucas's *Cnut*, fragmentation of the body abstracts the work away from any specific model. While the contemporary work resembles the *Belvedere Torso*, it does so felicitously rather than deliberately – and this is a function of fragmentation.²¹⁴ This movement away from ancient models enhances the overriding mood of realism: as with Rodin's "young girl", we are confronted by an anonymous – and bathetically mortal – body. But in the very expulsion of an identifiable model, Lucas's body in pieces (like Rodin's) proves itself classical. The way in which it solicits identities recalls the *Torso* and *Venus de*

²¹³ On the relationship between the *Torso* and Rodin's *The Thinker*, see Picard, 2013b, 53 (cf. Picard, 2013a, 91-93); Wünsche, 1998a; Fergonzi *et al.*, 1997, 120; Tancock, 1976, 112.

²¹⁴ Direct quotations of the *Belvedere Torso* and (in particular) the *Venus de Milo* are however easy to find in modern and contemporary art. See n. 115, above.

Milo. To contemplate the fragment is also to contemplate what the fragment once was, or might have been, or might yet be.

This is made clear by a text written by novelist Will Self on *Cnut*, in which his desire to ‘re-capitate’ the headless body echoes the various attempts, by artists and archaeologists, to confer a new identity on the *Torso*: “[Y]ou’re looking at it, and you’re adding on the top of the shoulders and the dip of the clavicle, and you’re shading in the dark hollows between the stretched tendons of the straining neck, and you’re shaping a face and head for this golem out of the mud of your unconscious – and surprise, it looks a bit like you, or your dad, or David Cameron.”²¹⁵ *Cnut* simultaneously arouses and resists the desire for completion, therefore, in the same way as ancient fragments have demanded to be set within a bigger picture, or broader art-historical pattern. To this extent, *Cnut* shares the quality that Pater observed in the *Venus de Milo* (“some spirit in the thing seems always on the point of breaking out”);²¹⁶ Self effects the same “sudden restoration” as Winckelmann envisioned in the *Belvedere Torso*: “the other missing limbs begin to take shape in my imagination”.²¹⁷ Even though Lucas’s body in pieces doesn’t achieve the same level of beauty as the *Torso* and *Venus* (for all of the precedent that Duchamp’s *Fountain* may provide, the abject spectacle of sitting on the toilet prevents this), it is still bound to those classical precursors by the force of analogy. It reproduces their open-ended effect, albeit to grittier ends.

Lucas’s ‘body in pieces’ serves us, more broadly, with a model for classical reception. Its correspondence with the ‘authorless’ *Belvedere Torso* helps to underline this thesis’s argument that an artist’s intentions need not circumscribe the way in which their work is understood. It is through an accident of composition that *Cnut* resembles the *Belvedere Torso*, yet that accident is felicitous. Even a work as subversive as Lucas’s submits ultimately to the traditional mode of comparative or iconographic analysis which was described in Chapter 1 (we can ‘see’ classical forms and subjects in the work), once we depart from a conventional understanding of ‘influence’ as explicit and intentional.

Indeed, the very deferral of intention produces meaning. Lucas has explained:

²¹⁵ Self, 2013, 50.

²¹⁶ Pater, op. cit.

²¹⁷ Winckelmann, 2013a, 146.

What people bring to it is always relevant, even before I as the artist have an idea of what that is. It's always in the reckoning, I mean: it's always something that's being played with, even if you don't see it till afterwards, see it retrospectively. It's a crucial, key factor in the mix. It's not as if it's irrelevant, what people bring to it. That is actually what you're playing with.²¹⁸

A revealing parallel may be drawn between Lucas's statement and that of political theorist John Seery, that "by making the admission that his work is indeed fiction, by admitting art's representational limitations (and by admitting that he is indeed a 'buffoon' and not a god) the ironic artist creates the dramatic space for his art to unfold as a valid activity in its own terms. His 'mockery' of art reveals a combination of detachment and affirmation."²¹⁹ Seery's description of the "ironic artist" corresponds with Lucas in so far as she provides a "dramatic" or interpretative space for her work; yet the description only applies so far. In place of "irony" or (self) mockery, Lucas exhibits a guileless candour about her work's appeal to "the historical imagination" and its openness to an analogical mode of analysis.²²⁰ For a programmatic example of that mode, we may again turn to Nochlin's essay, which proceeds through "a sequence of associations" rather than "direct causality".²²¹

Fragmentation interferes in – and enriches – the construction of meaning. It engenders what Nochlin has called, in relation to the paintings of Manet, an "unusual coincidence of the casual and the deliberate in Manet's pictorial vision."²²² We may trace a similar notion of coincidence in a statement by Lucas in an interview from 2005, in which she was asked whether she is interested in "classical" genres:

I'm interested in a lot of things. I wouldn't accord 'classic genres' a special place. Then again, things become classic because they've proved time and again and, relative to other ways, to work – beautifully. These things stick in the mind, but a lot of that kind of influence is unconscious or semi-conscious or, anyway, hard to remember later when the thing takes over.²²³

²¹⁸ Sarah Lucas, interview with James Cahill, 24 August 2015. Cf. Quinn: "I think the work has to function for people who know nothing about art history as well. But I think if you do know about it, there are many more resonances." Interview with James Cahill, 27 November 2015.

²¹⁹ Seery, 1990, 179-80. Quoted in Fowler, 2000, 9.

²²⁰ Barkan, op. cit. See Silverman, 2009, 11; Benjamin, 1998, 183. On agency, see also Gell, 1998, 24, 33-34; Tanner and Osborne, 2007, 1-27.

²²¹ Barkan, 1999, 119.

²²² Nochlin, 1994, 27.

²²³ Ruf, 2005, 30.

What is significant is that the ‘classic(al)’ (which she scrambles like “cnut” – words too becoming fragments), as discussed here, is conceptualised as something that may operate subliminally or semi-consciously, as both a vector of ‘tradition’ (“These things stick in the mind”) and something to be played with, exploited, or problematised (“I wouldn’t accord ‘classic genres’ a special place”). Through contemporary bodies in pieces, therefore, we find a concentrated example of the ways in which contemporary artists place themselves in respect to the classical tradition.²²⁴ We have seen already how that tradition is composed of a variety of accidental and intentional fragmentations:²²⁵ breakage is a recurring condition of classical art as it survives, and *sparagmos* is a prolific theme in classical art and text. This combination of the accidental and intentional continues to find a mirror image in the ways that contemporary artists relate to the classical past (variously squaring up to tradition, as Quinn does, or being indifferent to it).²²⁶

We have also seen how the implication of contemporary art within a classical tradition of fragmentation (the process of assimilation suggested by Lucan’s *agnosco*) is characterised by an ambiguity between the ‘real’ body and artistic representation. In both *Cnut* and *Self*, fragmentation functions both as a formal strategy and – more obliquely – as a theme. As in scenes of mythic violence, where painters reanimate the broken statues of antiquity, both Lucas and Quinn play with the distinctions between art and reality, the body *in toto* and the body in pieces. Lucas’s figure registers both as an artistic construct and as an ordinary body. In its concrete medium, it shares the conjunction of figurative form and rugged formlessness found in the *Belvedere Torso*. And yet the body itself – cast from life – is unheroically slender, its stomach creasing into a paunch.²²⁷ Nonetheless, this very lack of heroic musculature has classical precedents, specifically in ‘veristic’ portraiture (e.g. the Hellenistic ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman*; fig. 33) that engaged in a more visceral relationship with the real than that seen in ideal sculpture.²²⁸ There is an understated violence about Lucas’s figure, in its brokenness and attrition, which confuses these two identities. The pitted surface

²²⁴ On tradition and fragmentation, see Assmann 2007, 22-24.

²²⁵ See e.g. Elsen, 1981c, on the intentionality of Rodin’s fragments versus the arbitrariness of ancient fragments.

²²⁶ On the problems of ascribing intention, see Roberts, 1994, 20-23. Cf. Davidson, 1980, 48; Searle, 1983, 85. On Lucas’s supposed indifference to Art History, see Saltz, 1995, 81.

²²⁷ Cf. Hatt, 2001, 38: “the ideal nude has a skin wiped clean.” Cf. Winckelmann, 2013b (1755), 36-37.

²²⁸ See Chapter 2.

and coloration of the work give it a scarred quality – as close to a burnt corpse as an antiquated statue. Therefore, as with Ribera’s Marsyas, *Cnut* may be read alternately as a broken effigy and a damaged body. And yet the two are even less integrated than in Ribera’s horrifying scene: the cracks and seams left behind by Lucas’s piecemeal casting technique are indeed closer to those evoked by Procopius’s description of Domitian’s sutured skin.

In Quinn’s *Self*, there is a more overt convergence of the real human body with the work of art: the artist’s own blood has become the stuff of his bust. The isolation of the head from the body echoes Roman portraiture, rather than anonymizing its subject. Yet in this work, too, we find a compacted and cracked surface, similar to the ‘aged’ patina of Rodin’s figures and comparable to what the nineteenth-century critic Edmund Gosse described as a “pursuit of the accidental” in English sculpture in the same period.²²⁹ It once again produces the impression of the work having a longer history, and being subject to influences or interventions beyond those of the artist.

While Quinn’s work fulfils the traditional function of a portrait, its ‘shocking’ literalism – witnessed in its material and surface – expands its range of meanings. One effect is to highlight the underlying oddness of the bust as a representational formula, whereby a decapitated head is made to serve as commemoration and embodiment. It is the same oddness evoked by Juvenal, when he imagines Sejanus’s ‘head’ crackling and burning in the furnace.

JC: Does there still have to remain a cigarette paper between ‘real’ and ‘not real’?

MQ: The point of *Self* is that it’s the opposite. The more real you make it (it’s made in blood, it’s cast, it’s got all that) the more different it is from a real person. Realism isn’t about truth to materials, in a way. *Self* is real, but it’s not really real. There is a shock in seeing the inside on the outside. It looks very violent, because you don’t normally see blood except in violent situations. But in fact, it’s got a serenity to it.²³⁰

Self appears both bodiless and skinless, broken and flayed; it combines two kinds of fragmentation – the dismembered body and the stripped surface – to produce contradictory

²²⁹ Gosse, 1894, 311.

²³⁰ Marc Quinn, interview with James Cahill, 27 November 2015.

effects.²³¹ In ‘Sensation’ (fig. 49), *Self* (the original 1991 version) was installed close to another work, *No Visible Means of Escape* (1996; figs. 69-70), in which the artist’s body has been cast as a flaccid piece of skin – a juxtaposition which encourages the reading of *Self* as an *écorché* or flayed figure. Quinn was inspired, in this piece, by Michelangelo’s fresco of Saint Bartholomew holding up own skin (fig. 71) – a Christian counterpart to the story of Marsyas, and another of Michelangelo’s works which was influenced by the *Belvedere Torso*. This layering of references further underlines the point that sculptural and narrative ‘bodies in pieces’ have long implicated one another.²³² In *Self*, the liquid has frozen into irregular, scabbed layers, and yet the facial expression is one of serene, sculptural repose.²³³ With its closed eyes, Quinn’s head resembles a death mask or life mask. Capturing this idea of simultaneous trauma and tranquillity, stasis and aliveness, Quinn has spoken of the work as a “frozen moment on life support.”²³⁴

These ambiguous effects demonstrate that Quinn’s relationship with classical fragmentation involves far more than a casual subversion of the traditions of portraiture. Already in this chapter, we have seen how the myth of Marsyas evokes different conceptions of the body – as a frangible entity and as a wounded surface, as statue and as living flesh. In what ways might the myth similarly facilitate a reading of Quinn’s *Self*, which makes no explicit reference to the tale? Through a close analysis of Ovid’s story of Marsyas, it becomes clear that *Self* enacts and literalises (rather than merely depicting) themes at the heart of Ovid’s tale. Quinn’s sculpture – in its concurrent realism and artifice, violence and serenity (this second term evoking Winckelmann) – may indeed be seen as closer to Ovid’s conceptualisation of the ‘body in pieces’ than any depiction of the myth in painting.

According to the popular story of the flaying of Marsyas – which Ovid leaves implicit in the *Metamorphoses*²³⁵ – the satyr discovers pipes which Minerva, who invented them,²³⁶ threw away because they made her look ugly when she played them. He becomes so confident of his skill that he challenges Apollo to a contest. In previous sources, Apollo defeats Marsyas

²³¹ Compare the use of porphyry to mimic blood, e.g. in the marble basin added to the ‘*Dying Seneca*’ / *Old Fisherman*: Haskell and Penny, 1981, 7, 302-304.

²³² Cf. Quinn’s *You Take My Breath Away* (1992). See Stallabrass, 1999, 17. On *No Visible Means of Escape*, see Celant, 2013, 80-81. On Michelangelo’s fresco of Bartholomew, see Barkan, 198; Bohde, 2003, 22-25.

²³³ Cf. de Bolla, 2001, 1-2.

²³⁴ Cf. Green, 2011, 130, on Picasso’s use of busts: “a sculptural fragment or a bust can declare the fundamental sameness of the living and the dead as mere physical phenomena.”

²³⁵ Cf. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.4.2; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 165.

²³⁶ She is alluded to as *Tritoniaca*: *Met.* 6.364.

by trickery, turning his own lyre upside down and playing it superbly, before challenging Marsyas to do the same with his pipes. When the satyr is unable to do so, Apollo is judged the winner and permitted to do what he wishes with Marsyas. In the style of a painter or sculptor, Ovid collapses the narrative into a fleeting dramatic moment, beginning with the meting out of Marsyas's punishment:

[...] "Quid me mihi detrahis?" inquit:
 "a piget a non est" clamabat "tibia tanti."
 Clamanti cutis est summos direpta per artus,
 nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat; cruor undique manat,
 detectique patent nervi, trepidaeque sine ulla
 pelle micant venae; salientia viscera posses
 et perlucens numerare in pectore fibras.
 Illum ruricolae, silvarum numina, fauni
 et satyri fratres et tunc quoque carus Olympus
 et nymphae flerunt, et quisquis montibus illis
 lanigerosque greges armentaque buccera pavit.
 Fertilis inmaduit madefactaque terra caducas
 concepit lacrimas ac venis perbibit imis;
 quas ubi fecit aquam, vacuas emisit in auras.
 Inde petens rapidum ripis declivibus aequor
 Marsya nomen habet, Phrygiae liquidissimus amnis.

"Why do you tear me from myself? Forgive me! A flute is not worth this." As he screamed his skin was ripped from his arms. He was nothing other than a wound; blood poured everywhere; his muscles lay exposed, and his veins – left without any covering – quivered violently; you could pick out his wobbling intestines and the glistening fibres in his chest. The rustic fauns, spirits of the woods, and his brother satyrs wept for him, and then also his dear Olympus and the nymphs, and by whoever feeds the woolly flocks or horned cattle on those mountains. The fertile earth caught the falling tears and became drenched, absorbing them into her innermost veins, where she forged a spring and discharged them back into the clear air. Carving a rapid course through steep banks, it has the name of Marsyas, the clearest river in Phrygia.²³⁷

Marsyas is torn 'from himself', piece by piece. Aside from being an entity that may be broken, his body is also an unstable composite that may be stripped or rent.²³⁸ In the same

²³⁷ *Met.* 6.382-400.

²³⁸ Inclining towards René Descartes's view, as part of his dualistic theory, of the body as *res extensa*: leaky, contingent and progressing towards decomposition: Dicker, 2013, 86-87; 297-298. For a reading of Apollo and

way, Quinn's head evokes the interface between surface and interiority – the literal interior of the body, in terms of its innards, but also the psychological interior.²³⁹ *Self* is both a fragment and a subtler 'separation of the self from the self'. Quinn's warm blood has been frozen into sculptural (or, for that matter, painterly) matter – the stuff of his interior has been externalised as art. Likewise, Marsyas's insides (his wobbling innards, 387 *salientia viscera*, or the glistening fibres in his skinned chest, 388 *perlucentes in pectore fibras*) have been revealed to produce an all-encompassing wound (385 *nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat*). Both Ovid and Quinn bring life and death, and aestheticism and violence, into almost perverse proximity. As a disembodied head that continues to profess its eloquence, Quinn's *Self* is also a kind of contemporary Orpheus, whose head – cut loose and floating – continues to sing, its singing made more powerful and poignant by its detachment.

Quinn's *Self* may also be seen as Ovidian in the sense that it compresses (perhaps reconciles) divergent models of art. In common with several episodes in the *Metamorphoses*, the competition between Marsyas and Apollo is a test of *techné*: each competitor strives to outdo the other in the production of art. As Ribera's painting showed, the bodies of the two rivals – respectively human and hybrid, triumphant and abject – articulate a split between (literally) Apollonian and Dionysian conceptions of art.²⁴⁰ But how separable are these opposites? In Ovid's story, the division may appear clear-cut: one body is contingent, ugly and transgressive; and the other (which we never see) is robust, beautiful and ideal. When the satyr cries, *Quid me mihi detrahis?*,²⁴¹ the answer might be that he is being pulled apart by his corporeal opposite – the paragon of order and beauty. Yet in this way, the abject body refers automatically and inevitably to the body *in toto*: the two are mutually implicating. It is also the poet himself who plays the part of Apollo, flaying Marsyas before his reader's 'eyes' and relishing in the visceral details of his wounds through the ordering medium of poetry; Charles Martindale writes of "the combination of cruelty with a certain wit and detachment and the unruffled stylishness with which acts of violence are described".²⁴²

Dionysus as harmony and dissonance, in relation to Foucault's conception of *parrhesia*, see Siisiäinen, 2013, 120-121.

²³⁹ Cf. Clark, 2014, in relation to Rembrandt's portraits.

²⁴⁰ See n. 197.

²⁴¹ "[T]hese words, attributed to the satyr, are, of course, the witty observation of the poet": Anderson, 1972, 202.

²⁴² Martindale, 1988, 4. Compare Andreas Vesalius's 1543 anatomical 'cut-away' of the *Belvedere Torso*: reproduced in Kusakawa, 2006, 86.

While Apollo may be the winner according to Ovid, the body in pieces and its opposite are suspended in a necessary balance within the text. One cannot eclipse the other. This helps to explain the fundamental nature and appeal of fragmentation in art. As a body in pieces, Marsyas is not a representation of abject formlessness, but rather a figure poised between form and dissolution, as is succinctly expressed by the paradox of *nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat* (“he was no longer anything other than a wound”) – the breach in the satyr’s body subsumes his entire body, turning rupture itself a new kind of wholeness. What appears to be a rigid opposition is, therefore, made manifest as a dialectic that plays out within the artwork or text. This idea may be applied to both the contemporary artworks analysed in this chapter, *Cnut* and *Self*. Despite (indeed, because of) their fragmented anatomy and surface attrition, these bodies allude to the body *as a whole*. The idealised, total (notionally classical) body is ever an implied or suppressed presence in works which disrupt and divide that body. At the same time, these works turn fragmentation into its own kind of totality.

When seen as exemplary of the inherent fragmentariness of classical art, or the thematised violence of classical myth, our contemporary examples deconstruct the ingrained opposition (dramatised in the tale of Apollo and Marsyas) between wholeness or stability and fragmentation and flux. As Nochlin argues, the latter characterisation may be as reductive as the former: “it is by no means possible to assert that modernity may only be associated with, or suggested by, a metaphoric or actual fragmentation. On the contrary, paradoxically, or dialectically, modern artists have moved toward its opposite, with a will to totalization embodied in the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*”.²⁴³ Art is a reconciling of fragment and whole, a dual acknowledgment of, and attempt to accommodate, gaps; or what Nochlin calls “a joining up of unrelated fragments in a pictorial totality where the very arbitrariness of the cuts and joints emphasizes the artfulness of the project as whole”.²⁴⁴ By reading the works of Lucas and Quinn through classical ‘texts’ which might seem unrelated or arbitrary – texts which have had no direct part in these works’ formulation – I have demonstrated how fragmentation invites, or even demands, a process of ‘reading in’ on the part of the viewer. Fragmentation of the body exemplifies the way in which contemporary art frequently downplays or disavows authorial intention, in order to stimulate a process of what Nochlin

²⁴³ Nochlin, 1994, 53.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

calls “joining up of unrelated fragments”. As with Dalí’s *Venus*, fragmentation in these works produces an evacuation of – and thereby a repository for – meaning.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that we gain a stronger understanding of contemporary bodies in pieces by considering their uses of fragmentation within a *longue durée* classical context. What ultimately enables these works to qualify as classical is the way in which we look at their fragmentations of the body. These fragmentations are one of the key connections between the classical and the contemporary, enabling us to look back through time, and showing that fragmentation is not simply a by-product of history but a way of shaping and seeing art that was conceptualised in the ancient world. In their depictions of bodies in pieces, contemporary artists are not simply replicating the fragmented ‘look’ of antique sculptures through allusion or implicit resonance; they are reprising complex and contradictory understandings of the body that stretch back to antiquity – namely the commensurability of body and artistic representation, and the idea of the body’s dual vulnerability and robustness.

If one is looking to explain the full potency of contemporary art’s fragmentary bodies, then it is imperative that we relate those bodies to the longer history of fragmentation, and above all to the idea that fragmentation itself gives shape to tradition (or what was earlier termed the “historical imagination”). This chapter has traced a history comprised of the broken bodies of antiquity proper, the narratives of corporeal mutilation and iconoclasm that recur throughout Roman myth and history, and the broken bodies that came to light in the Renaissance and after. Throughout the examples we have witnessed, fragmentation and rupture are variously celebrated, theorised, and aestheticized. By surveying the different appearances and uses of body in pieces since antiquity, we have seen how the body in pieces has become a resonant symbol of the classical tradition. Contemporary artists who continue to experiment with the body in pieces are not only echoing (however unconsciously) these earlier examples, but are writing themselves into that same tradition. Even at its most contingent, unstable and provocative, the contemporary body in pieces stands in a direct and vital relationship with classical conceptions of the body in art.

Chapter 4: Classical Plaster Casts and Contemporary Art

1. Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the figurative plaster cast, a category of object which I argue bridges classical antiquity and the art of the present. As with the previous two ‘lenses’ deployed in this thesis, I use the figurative plaster cast to argue that contemporary art remains linked, both in form and meaning, to the classical past and its particular history of reception. This is not to say that all figurative plaster casts spell ‘art’ as opposed to ‘science’, or that all speak of Greek and Roman antiquity over and above anything else. It is rather to argue that the moment a self-declared artist deploys a plaster cast of the human figure, in a work that asks to be seen as art, they are harnessing both the form and the shifting function of the plaster cast – as stand-in, simulacrum, or *sui generis* artwork¹ – as it was harnessed throughout the classical tradition. By looking at specific examples of plaster casts in antiquity and in the post-antique reception of antiquity, this chapter reaffirms the idea that much of the ‘art’ of contemporary art resides in a narrative, the foundations of which lie in Greece and Rome, and in the Renaissance.

Whatever figurative casts might mean, they have been central to the transmission of Greco-Roman sculpture, and this transmission central to the making of new art since antiquity.² Second, plaster casts of the figurative kind are ubiquitous in modern and contemporary art.³ Still today, artists quote or manipulate classical plaster casts – for example the American artist Jeff Koons in his series of *Gazing Ball* sculptures (2013-2014; figs. 72-73), which combine full-scale casts of classical statues with mirrored glass spheres;⁴ or Austrian artist Oliver Laric, who in 2011 annexed the classical plaster cast collection of the Skulpturhalle Basel in an installation, entitled ‘Kopienkritik’, which included resin casts and film installations (fig. 74).⁵ More broadly, the figurative plaster cast – with or without a specific classical form – has played a prominent role in the work of leading twentieth-century

¹ On the simulacrum, see Baudrillard, 2001.

² Frederiksen and Marchand, 2010a; MacGregor, 2007, 88-92; Düll and Stemmer, 2000; Kurtz, 2000; Söderlind, 1999b; Connor, 1989; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 16-17, 31-36.

³ Malvern, 2010; Collins, 2007, 34-35, 104-105.

⁴ Holmes, 2017b; Rothkopf, 2014, 203-211; Bonami, 2013; Sørensen, 2013.

⁵ ‘Kopienkritik’, Skulpturhalle Basel, Basel, 8 June to 14 August 2011. See Demand, 2016. On *kopienkritik* see n. 86.

sculptors such as George Segal and Eduardo Paolozzi.⁶ It has recurred in the works of western contemporary artists as diverse, in style and subject, as Louise Bourgeois, Tony Cragg, Robert Gober, Anthea Hamilton, Thomas Schütte, and Rebecca Warren.⁷

In this chapter, I propose that these two facts – the influence of the figurative plaster cast in the perpetuation of classical art, and the prominence of the figurative plaster cast in contemporary art – are related. The vital role of the plaster cast in the dissemination of Greek and Roman art makes it an object that qualifies as classical. At the same time, the role of the cast in classical reception can be used to explain the object's enduring resonance and appeal in contemporary art. Using a plaster cast in figurative form can be seen as a continuation of the classical artistic tradition; the plaster figures of George Segal, for example, bear an immediate resemblance to the gesturing figure groups of antiquity,⁸ despite the fact that many of his subjects are modern and quotidian (pedestrians waiting to cross the road; a man and women sitting on benches; commuters on the bus; figs. 75-77).⁹ One might go as far as to say that even when the cast in question is not one with an obvious classical referent – or one which appears to renounce the classical tradition altogether – an argument can be made that it remains indelibly classical as a category of object.

This chapter will look at two principal examples of figurative plaster casts in contemporary British art – by Sarah Lucas and Mark Wallinger. It begins by examining a series of plaster casts made by Lucas for an exhibition at the 2015 Venice Biennale, objects which might appear disconnected from the history of classical art in terms of their crude finish and bathetic content. These objects are juxtaposed with another contemporary use of the plaster cast, by Wallinger, in which the artist's engagement with classical art is – by contrast – literal and deliberate. Despite the apparent antithesis between Lucas and Wallinger, I propose that both examples gain in power and meaning from being situated within the longer history hinted at in the opening paragraphs, in which the plaster cast has functioned as a means of reproducing – and ensuring fame to – statues.

⁶ On Segal, see Livingstone, 1998, especially 14-31, 56-68, 92-96; Hunter, 1989; Tuchman, 1983. On Paolozzi, see Hermann and Foote, 2017; Collins, 2014, 268-275; Pearson, 1999, especially, 31-32, 62; Konnertz, 1984; Kirkpatrick, 1970, 19-83.

⁷ Cf. the exhibition 'Plasters: Casts and Copies', Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire, 2 May 2015 to 8 May 2016.

⁸ Hunter, 1989, 13.

⁹ Certain of Segal's works do refer to classical models, e.g. *The Dancers* (model 1971, cast 1982, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1983.78.1 – bronze casts covered with a white patina). See Tuchman, 1983, 26-29, 52-55, 64, 67-68, 96-98.

The chapter then traces one possible history – what might be seen as the primary history for figurative casts used in an overtly art-historical context. This section concentrates on a sequence of examples from different historical moments, in order to emphasise the changing role and status of the plaster cast from antiquity through to the Renaissance and after. By virtue of this brief survey, I argue that plaster casts have become singularly powerful agents of classical reception because of their binary status: they embody an absent original work of art (more closely, arguably, than any copy) while remaining materially distinct from that original.¹⁰ They may be seen both as close substitutes for ancient statues, but also as ephemeral and fragile multiples. Repeatedly, from antiquity through to the academic cast galleries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we see how this dual status has made the plaster cast a uniquely eloquent object in the transmission of classical art – and, ultimately, a symbol of the classical per se. This section of the chapter ends by showing how the long academic history of the plaster cast persisted in the works of twentieth-century Italian artists. These works played explicitly with the symbolic status of the plaster cast – with its specifically classical identity.

The final part of the chapter returns to the opening examples. It demonstrates how the long history of the figurative plaster cast in western art not only enhances any reading of the object in its contemporary iterations, but also fundamentally explains the appeal of the plaster cast for artists today. This final section argues that both Wallinger and Lucas are cognisant of their place in this tradition. As a category of object, the plaster cast brings their work into direct alignment with tradition, regardless of the work's subject matter.

2. Sarah Lucas and Mark Wallinger: two contemporary uses of the plaster cast

I begin this chapter by looking at a series of plaster casts made by Sarah Lucas. As we have already seen, Lucas came to prominence in the 1990s for works which were widely considered abrasive, lewd, and indifferent to artistic tradition.¹¹ From the beginning of her career, she has confronted themes such as gender, sex and death in a bawdy and irreverent fashion – using found objects, or rough-and-ready casts. The previous chapter's case-study,

¹⁰ The key Modernist analysis of the 'original' and reproduction (specifically photography) is Benjamin, 2002. Cf. Benjamin, 1991, 143-154; Melberg, 2005. See also Krauss, 1986, especially 152-153; and Krauss, 1989.

¹¹ See Chapter 3, n. 34-35 and n. 226.

Cnut, was a cast made from concrete; but Lucas has also produced numerous works in plaster using throwaway moulds, often depicting parts of the body.¹² In 2015, she represented Britain at the Venice Biennale with an exhibition centred on ten of these sculptures – a series she called the *Muses* (figs. 78-89).¹³

These works are a productive starting-point because they might appear, on initial acquaintance, to have little or nothing to do, aesthetically at least, with classical antiquity. Lucas's plaster 'figures', if we can call them that, are not cast from statues in the Belvedere or Capitoline – they are not classical or classicizing in any traditional sense.¹⁴ Rather, they are cast from her own naked body and the bodies of her friends.¹⁵ Each of these 'figures' is in fact a disembodied pair of legs, truncated at the waist, and positioned so as to sit or sprawl on a different piece of furniture – an old desk, a freezer, a toilet bowl. Each has a cigarette tucked provocatively into one crevice or another. From this brief summary, it is clear that Lucas's roughshod plasters are anything but 'high art'.¹⁶ It is not simply that they are not typically classical in their subject-matter – being cast from real, ungainly bodies – but also that they are deliberately vulgar in their content and import. One of the more negative appraisals of the Venice exhibition, by a critic from *The Daily Mail*, remarked that: "It's as if a bunch of schoolboys have broken into John Lewis and had a field day chopping up mannequins in the white goods department."¹⁷

If at first sight Lucas's plaster casts seem to have nothing to do with the classical, then the work of her close contemporary Mark Wallinger is marked by an explicit embrace.

Wallinger, whose work we saw in the chapter on realism, is probably best known for his life-size sculpture of Christ *Ecce Homo* (1999; fig. 90), the first work to be displayed on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth.¹⁸ As this marbleized resin figure demonstrated, Wallinger is an artist

¹² Dziewior and Ruf, 2005, 128, 146, 153; Lucas, 2012, 12, 40-42, 49-67, 108-109; Blazwick and Bowers, 2013, 68-69; Malvern, 2010, 358.

¹³ 'I SCREAM DADDIO', British Pavilion, 56th Venice International Art Biennale, 9 May to 22 November 2015. See Lucas, 2015, 12-29, 100-107.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3, n. 125. On the Capitoline, see Paul, 2012; Wren Christian, 2010, 103-119; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 8-11, 15. On casts as emblems of Winckelmannian neoclassicism, see Connor, 1989, 206-207; Gallo, 2015, 163. On their changing status in post-Winckelmann Europe, see Settis, 2013.

¹⁵ See however Pliny, *HN*, 35.153, for an ancient account of life-casting. Cf. Frederiksen, 2010, 21; Konstam and Hoffmann, 2004. Cennino Cennini (c. 1360-1427) describes life-casting: *ibid*, 1960, 126-129. In 1568 Vasari records Verocchio's use of the practice: *ibid*, 1987, 239. Cf. Fusco, 1982, 182-183; Warburg, 1999b, 207.

¹⁶ On 'high art' see Fisher, 2001; Sontag, 1966, 286-287. Cf. Chapter 3, n. 44.

¹⁷ Mount, 2015.

¹⁸ Herbert, 116-120, 134-139; Schuppli, 2007, 49-52; Rugoff, 2001; Bulgakov and Searle, 2000; Burrows, 2000.

whose work is deeply invested in Art History, including the history of classical art.¹⁹ For an exhibition which he curated at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2009, he made this investment clear. This was called ‘The Russian Linesman’ (named after the linesman who allowed England a controversial goal against West Germany in the 1966 World Cup) and featured a number of the artist’s own works alongside a variety of artefacts and artworks, each exploring the ambiguities of perception and the threshold between reality and illusion.²⁰

As we have seen already in this thesis, such concepts are themselves rooted in ancient discourses. In its very format, moreover, ‘The Russian Linesman’ invoked a mode of collecting and display – that of the *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities – that was part of the rediscovery of the antique from the Renaissance onwards.²¹ Both the guiding premise and physical format of the show were indebted to the classical tradition. Against these background elements of classicism, Wallinger presented a plaster cast of the *Dying Gaul* or *Trumpeter* (known in the Renaissance as *The Dying Gladiator*; figs. 91-93).²² The cast, borrowed from the Edinburgh College of Art,²³ reproduces a masterpiece of Hellenistic and Roman art (fig. 94), one which has been repeatedly replicated in plaster and bronze in palaces and academies.²⁴ In this example, the ‘supporting’ arm has been broken so that the figure seems to rest on thin air. In ‘The Russian Linesman’, Wallinger placed it close to a nineteenth-century anatomical model, a plaster *écorché*, in the same pose, borrowed from the Royal Academy (figs. 95-96).²⁵ This pairing introduced the idea of a sequence, connecting classical art to humanity in its most literal instantiation – stripped back to muscle and sinew.

¹⁹ See e.g. Rugoff, 2014, 18; Moore Ede, 2013; Hunt, 2000, 29-30.

²⁰ ‘The Russian Linesman’, Hayward Gallery, London, 18 February to 4 May 2009. Wallinger, 2009, especially 7 and 99-101.

²¹ On the *Wunderkammer* see MacGregor, 2007, 11-69; Grinke, 2006, 7-17; Pomian, 1990, especially 45-64; Impey and MacGregor, 1985, *passim*; Kaufmann, 1979. On the association between the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer*, the seminal study is von Schlosser, 1908.

²² *Dying Gaul*, Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 44, 224-227. Heinrich Brunn first linked the statue with Pergamene groups: Brunn, 1870, 292-293; cf. Stewart, 2004, 207; Smith, 1991, 100-102. On the statue and its putative prototype, see also Stewart, 2004, 14, 16, 147-148, 206-212; Marszal, 2000, 208-209, 221-222; Spivey, 1996, 211-212; Ridgway, 1990, 284-296. A possible textual record is Pliny’s description of the “battles of Attalus and Eumenes against the Gauls” (*HN*, 34.84), and Epigonos’s sculpture of a trumpeter (*HN*, 34.88); cf. Marszal, 2000, 192-193. Marvin, 2002, argues against a direct connection to Attalid monuments: *ibid*, 207-210, 218. On the statue’s origins in the *Horti Sallustiani* and entry into the Ludovisi Collection, see Marvin, 2002, 205-206.

²³ MacGregor, 2007, 244.

²⁴ It was first reproduced as an engraving: Perrier, 1638, plate 91. Cf. Howard, 1990, 190, n. 9. The first recorded plaster cast was made for Philip IV of Spain in 1650: Haskell and Penny, 1981, 225 and n. 17. The numerous casts in Britain include the 1773 bronze by Luigi Valadier at Syon House, Middlesex: MacGregor, 2007, 243; Coltman, 2006, 141-148; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 86-88.

²⁵ Nicknamed ‘Smugglerius’, the Academy’s first *écorché* was made in 1776; the surviving version is a copy from 1834. The body of a hanged smuggler was flayed, arranged as the *Dying Gaul*, and cast by sculptor Agostino Carlini in collaboration with William Hunter, Professor of Anatomy. See the account of John Deare

Walleringer has explained how the object of the plaster cast appealed in two significant ways, both as an emotive work of art and as a symbol of reproduction and reinvention:

I liked the fact that it expresses the whole relationship between Greek and Roman culture: something which might have started as a bronze has been re-rendered as a carving, and has then been cast. After that, some poor unfortunate has come down from the scaffold and been placed in the same pose for the benefit of students at the Royal Academy. It's one of those key images of suffering and of pity. The particular version I used is from Edinburgh College of Art, where his leaning arm is missing. You naturally, empathetically, fill in the missing limb: there's a kind of instinct.²⁶

Walleringer's statement reveals a multi-layered engagement with classical art. That engagement focuses on a particular artwork ("one of those key images of suffering and of pity"), but it also extends to the broader historical condition of Greco-Roman art. Wallinger is fascinated by the way in which the *Dying Gaul* – already an example of an enduring sculptural type²⁷ – became part of a culture of serial reproduction, both in casts and copies. In 1644 the diarist John Evelyn wrote of the *Dying Gaul* that "In the Palace [Villa Ludovisi] I must never forget that famous statue of the Gladiator, spoken of by Pliny, and so much followed by all the rare Artists, as the many Copies and statues testifie, now almost dispers'd through all Europ, both in stone & metall."²⁸ For Wallinger, that pattern of replication is anticipated in the 'original' Roman statue, and compressed in the pairing of the plaster cast and matching *écorché*.

What we have seen, in the cases of Lucas and Wallinger, are two distinct examples of the plaster cast in contemporary art – one seemingly divorced from the classical, the other embracing the classical. They appear to be completely different entities, but over the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that they are not as antithetical as they appear, and that

reported in Whitley, 1928, 277. See also Aymonino, 2015, 50-51; Hales, 2011, 161; Fenton, 2006, 77-81; Valentine, 1991, 64-66; Richardson, 1987, especially 30-51 (see also *ibid*, 131-58, 93-215); Hutchison, 1986, 34. On intersections between anatomy and classical sculpture, see Aymonino, 2015, 41-52; Nichols, 2015, 63-64; Brooks and Rumsey, 2007.

²⁶ Mark Wallinger, interview with James Cahill, 16 November 2015.

²⁷ Brunn, 1870, 292-293; Marvin, 2002, 221; Howard, 1990, 30-31; Ridgway, 1990, 284-296. On the Ludovisi barbarians as stereotypes, see Marvin, 2002, 211-212 and 211, n. 35.

²⁸ Evelyn, 1955, 235. Quoted in Haskell and Penny, 1981, 225.

both projects benefit from being read as part of the same history. Simply by calling her installation of plaster figures *Muses*, Lucas demands that we do this. Following an examination of that history, I will return to Wallinger and Lucas to consider how their respective uses of the plaster cast exploit the object's classical identity – both its status in antiquity, and its role in the transmission of classical art.

3. *Plaster casts in history*

This section conducts a brief history of the figurative plaster cast as an agent and embodiment of classical artistic reception. It does so by means of a sequence of historical 'snapshots' which reveal the ways in which casts have been envisioned and deployed in different periods. Throughout, this section foregrounds two questions: first, what is special or singular about the 'plaster cast' category? And second, to what extent is this category formative of classical art, and defining of the very concept of the classical? If it becomes clear that figurative plaster casts in art do something that other statues do not, and that they are, in a sense, innately classical, then it will also be clear that their history *as art objects* begins in antiquity and cannot be easily jettisoned.

3.1 *Plaster casts in antiquity*

In order to assess the nature and function of the plaster cast in antiquity, I will look at two sources. The first is archaeological – the workshop of plaster casts which was excavated at the ancient resort of Baiae, near Naples, in 1954 – and the second is literary, an extract from Juvenal's second *Satire*, in which we find a reference to a plaster cast in a patron's house. In Baiae, some 400 fragmentary plaster casts were found in a cellar-like area forming the substructure of a hall or terrace within the resort's great Sosandra bath complex (figs. 97-98).²⁹ Dated to the early first century AD, these casts are believed to have served a sculptors' workshop for a period of more than a century and a half.

What does this find tell us about the plaster cast as a category of object? Clearly, plaster was a convenient working tool – cheap, malleable, and affording a high level of representational

²⁹ Landwehr, 1982; Landwehr, 1985, especially 1-7, 27-39, 181-188; Landwehr, 2010.

accuracy. Indeed, the quality of the casts from Baiae (in particular, those fragments taken from the *Tyrannicide* group, depicting Aristogeiton and Harmodius; figs. 99-101),³⁰ is so high that it has been suggested that they are primary casts taken directly from Greek bronze originals, and that they served as references in the carving of Roman marble ‘copies’.³¹ The plaster cast was thus one of the modes by which celebrated archetypes – above all, the ‘ideal sculptures’ of classical Greece – found their way into thousands of Roman versions.³² It was a vehicle of classical reception – a means of reifying and rarifying classical (specifically Greek) artistic models; and evidence, no less, that – as James Porter has argued – the backwards-looking glance we have come to term ‘classicism’ began in antiquity.³³

Baiae is not the only source to tell us how plaster casts were used and viewed in the Roman world. I will now look in detail at a passage from Juvenal’s second *Satire* (c. AD 100), which refers to a plaster bust of a Greek philosopher kept by a nouveau-riche Roman patron in his house.³⁴ This passage is one of the few references in ancient literature to such ownership.³⁵

ultra Sauromatas fugere hinc libet et glaciale
Oceanum, quotiens aliquid de moribus audent
qui Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt,
indocti primum, quamquam plena omnia gypso
Chrysippi invenias; nam perfectissimus horum,
si quis Aristotelen similem vel Pittacon emit
et iubet archetypos pluteum servare Cleanthas.

I would gladly run away to Sarmatia and the frozen Ocean,
whenever those who mimic the Curii while living like
Bacchanals dare to broach the subject of morals. First, they are
uneducated, although you would find their houses overflowing
with plaster busts of Chrysippus; for consummate among them
is the one who has bought a likeness of Aristotle or Pittacus, and
bids that his bookcase preserves original portraits of Cleanthes.³⁶

³⁰ Richter, 1970; Landwehr, 1982, 24-26; Landwehr, 1985, 27-39, nos. 1-8; Mattusch, 1988, 122-125.

³¹ Landwehr, 1982, 16; Mattusch, 1996, 191.

³² See Frederiksen, 2010, especially 18-23; Kurtz, 2000, 1-2; Grafton *et al*, 2010, 815-816; Marvin, 1997, 21-22; Landwehr, 1985, 12-25; Landwehr, 1982, especially 16-18.

³³ Porter, 2006, especially 29-53. Cf. Settis, 2006, 67-73.

³⁴ Cf. Frederiksen, 2010, 24-25.

³⁵ Other ancient authors refer to the practice, if not the artistic status, of plaster casting: Frederiksen, 2010, 21-22. E.g. Lucian, *Zeus tragoedus*, 33. See Mattusch, 1996, 191-192.

³⁶ Juvenal, *Satura II*, 1-7.

This passage is important because it shows that plaster casts were not merely workshop tools or intermediaries in imperial Rome. They were viewed and esteemed in their own right. If we leave aside the caustic voice of Juvenal, and consider the plaster cast of Chrysippus from the point of view of its imaginary owner, it becomes clear that plaster casts could be highly regarded and valued. A plaster representation of a Greek philosopher might have the same status (however foolishly, in Juvenal's view) as the marble or bronze original from which it was presumably created – as a portrait and a symbol of virtue and learning.³⁷ We might compare the plaster cast of the *Dying Gaul* in Wallinger's 'The Russian Linesman', which conveyed both the sculptural form and the poignant theme of the marble original, to the extent that cast and original were elided in the artist's recollection as "one of those key images of suffering and of pity". Juvenal's suggestion that an art collector might try to pass off plaster reproductions as "original portraits" (7 *archetypos*) further reflects the ease with which plaster and marble might be elided, at least in the libraries and minds of the "uneducated" (4 *indocti*). Plaster casts replicated, and even replaced, marble prototypes (7 *iubet archetypos pluteum servare Cleanthes*: "he bids that his bookcase houses original portraits of Cleanthes.")

Something about the plaster cast's capacity to reproduce or substitute an earlier artwork made it appealing from the point of view of the patron. As well as a studio prop, a plaster cast might function as a library portrait.³⁸ Juvenal's reference to the "bookcase" or "shelf" (*pluteum*) as the site of display is significant. It appears to place the "plaster cast of Chrysippus" and other such likenesses within a specific category of artwork – the portrait bust – characteristic of such settings.³⁹ From this, we may draw broader inferences about the nature and uses of the plaster cast. Pliny's description of the library as a kind of portrait gallery helps to show how the portrait bust became an emblem of philosophical and literary tradition, looking back to Greece and imaginatively embodying the past:

non est praetereundum et noviciū inventum, siquidem non ex
auro argenteove, at certe ex aere in bibliothecis dicantur illis,

³⁷ On the image of Chrysippus in antiquity, see Zanker, 1995, 97-112; and on Roman portraits of Greek philosophers, poets and statesmen, *ibid.*, 9-39. On Roman philhellenism, see, *inter alia*, Pollitt, 1978; Zanker, 1995, 198-266; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 68-71, 89-105; Elsner, 2006b; Porter, 2006, 29-52; Marvin, 2008; Anguissola, 2015; Zanker, 2015.

³⁸ On the library as a site of display for busts from antiquity into the eighteenth century, see Coltman, 2006, 152-155. On the imperial Roman house, cf. Wallace-Hadrill, 1994, especially 17-37.

³⁹ See Chapter 3, n. 27.

quorum immortales animae in locis iisdem locuntur, quin immo etiam quae non sunt finguntur, pariuntque desideria non traditos vultus, sicut in homero evenit.

There is a new invention which should not be overlooked, whereby likenesses are dedicated in libraries – certainly in bronze, if not in gold or silver – of those whose immortal spirits who communicate with us in these places. Indeed, likenesses are invented for those who don’t exist, and longing gives shape to faces that have not been handed down to us, as in the case of Homer.⁴⁰

What does Pliny’s statement reveal, not simply about the genre of the portrait bust, but about the *plaster* bust of Juvenal’s *Satire*? At one level, it helps us to understand how the “plaster cast of Chrysippus” was intended to be viewed; that is, as an embodiment of the “immortal spirit” of the Greek philosopher in the domestic space of the Roman patron’s library.⁴¹ It shows how the library portrait was a recognised genre – formulaic, venerable and (by dint of transporting revered ancient Greeks into the Roman present) already classicizing. But it also points to the way in which the plaster cast, by dint of standing in as a portrait bust, was itself an object that could bring the Greek and Roman past into the present. Already, through the example of Baiae, we have seen how the plaster cast was a means of embodying antique models. We have also seen how, in certain cases (for example the *Dying Gaul* or Aristogeiton and Harmodius), those models were versions of long-lost originals analogous to Pliny’s “faces that have not been handed down to us” (*non traditos vultus*). The plaster cast, too, was a means of transmitting “immortal spirits” (*immortales animae*) of the past, and of reinventing the past in new forms. As this chapter progresses, we will see how the role ascribed by Pliny to the portrait bust – as a vehicle of classical reception and an opportunity for reinventing the classical – was also the role of the plaster cast itself, from antiquity to the Renaissance to the twentieth century.

But it is also clear, from Juvenal’s *Satire*, that the plaster cast might be viewed in less elevated terms. Even if a “plaster bust” could stand in for an original portrait, plaster was a cheap and ephemeral material – not the standard medium of an original artwork, whether marble or the metals mentioned by Pliny. For this reason, it was ambivalent in its import.

⁴⁰ Pliny, *HN*, 35.2.9. Other ancient references to busts in libraries include Pliny, *Epistulae*, 3.78; Cicero, *Ad Atticum*, 4.10.1; Martial, *Epigrammata*, 9.47.1-3. See Houston, 2014, 209, n. 113.

⁴¹ On *philosophoi* versus elite Roman society, see Trapp, 2007, 18-27, 226-257; cf. Zanker, 1995, 202-210.

Juvenal's own view in the *Satire* is that the plaster cast traduces, rather than translates, the authority of its original referent. He interprets the object in terms of its cheapness and reproducibility (4 *plena* underlines its capacity to be multiplied *ad infinitum*).

More than this, Juvenal turns the plaster bust into a symbol of wider deterioration in taste and morals.⁴² Owning an ersatz Chrysippus is the first instance of vulgarity in a mounting sequence of *exempla* of duplicity, which are linked continually to male effeminacy.⁴³ In a sense, Juvenal's viewpoint prefigures Susan Sontag's equation of the mass-replica with a "camp" sensibility: "Camp – Dandyism in the age of mass culture – makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica."⁴⁴ Later in the same poem, a lawyer named Creticus is lambasted (67-77) for prosecuting adulteresses, despite his own penchant for wearing a gauze dress. His lewd garment is the symptom of a moral sickness that will spread uncontrollably: 82-83 *Foedius hoc aliquid quandoque audebis amictu; / nemo repente fuit turpissimus* ("Some day you will venture upon something more repulsive than this dress; no one has become entirely depraved in an instant"). Reflecting this shift from minor to major turpitude, Juvenal's *Satire* itself moves from the innocuous detail of the plaster bust into a lurid caricature of dissipation.

For Juvenal, then, the plaster cast signifies pretence: it is the visual counterpart to his verbal aphorism: 8 *frontis nulla fides* ("don't trust appearances"). It reflects a general degradation of the 'original' – be that sculpture, gender role, or social class. The archaeologist Rune Frederiksen has inferred from the *Satire*: "casts were the exhibits of the ambitious middle class as opposed to the old aristocracy and upper class that owned and displayed the 'genuine article', namely the more frequently spoken of statues in stone and precious metals."⁴⁵ And certainly, by drawing a moralistic opposition between the 'genuine article' and its opposite, Juvenal implies that the plaster cast could be interpreted in two distinct ways – as an original work of art, or for what it really was, a cheap knock-off. But were these alternatives so clear-cut? If we think about the domestic *gypsum* in the wider context of imperial Roman art – a

⁴² Cf. Pliny's narrative of *artistic* efflorescence and decline (*HN*, 34-35), and its reprisal by Winckelmann: Schein, 2008, 78-79; Potts, 1994, 39. On the trope in Art History, see Marvin, 2008, 30-34; Settis, 2006, 74-75; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 68-74.

⁴³ See the commentaries of Courtney, 2013, 99-125; Braund, 1996, 121-167. On Juvenal's theme of effeminacy, see Uden, 2015, 64-67; Walters, 1998.

⁴⁴ Sontag, 1966, 289.

⁴⁵ Frederiksen, 2010, 25. On the Roman 'middle classes', see Mayer, 2012; and on the problems of the concept, Wallace-Hadrill, 2013.

context in which Greek models were continually emulated and adapted – it is arguable that the plaster cast derived some of its appeal precisely from being a reproduction. In other words, there was cachet to be had in unoriginality.⁴⁶

Above all, Juvenal's *Satire* is useful, together with the example of Baiae, in showing that the status of the plaster cast was unstable. It was interpretable variously as an artistic tool, finished product, and empty replica. When we come to consider these alternate roles in terms of the plaster cast's longer history, it becomes increasingly clear that they are not cleanly separable. The plaster cast always refers to an absent model *while at the same time* asserting its independent status – its autonomy – as a cast. Its white material is only approximate to marble, and its body (although not hollow) is a kind of shell – light and brittle. But it is valuable nonetheless: the Baiae cast of the 'Head of Aristogeiton' *is* Aristogeiton (fig. 102), and yet signs the original's absence – and it does this more obviously than any bronze replica, which would look to all intents and purposes like a bronze original.⁴⁷

3.2 Plaster casts in the Renaissance

Through a second historical 'snapshot' – the classical plaster cast in the aristocratic collections of the Renaissance – it is possible to pursue this idea of 'dual agency'.⁴⁸ To what extent did the cast's dual status cause it to become a catalyst of an evolving classical artistic tradition in Europe? Casting from the antique began in earnest with the resurgence of interest in classical statuary in the fifteenth century – a resurgence that amounted to a 'rediscovery', notwithstanding the fact that ancient sculpture had been on display for centuries before. Arguably, the modern (i.e. post-classical) history of the plaster cast is synonymous with that of classical sculpture. When we think about the earliest classical casts of the Renaissance, we tend to think of grand gestures such as François I of France populating his garden with stately

⁴⁶ On 'copies' and seriality in Greco-Roman art, see especially Settis, 2015; Beard and Henderson, 2001, 89-105; Gazda, 2002, especially 1-16; Mattusch, 2002, especially 106-107, 115; Marvin, 2008, 121-167; Bartman, 1988, especially 214-220; Landwehr, 1982, 10-15, 31-40. On miniaturisation, see Bartman, 1992, 9-48.

⁴⁷ On Greek bronzes see *inter alia* Mattusch, 1988, 1-9; Mattusch, 2002, 109-110.

⁴⁸ On aristocratic and papal collections in the Renaissance and after, see Cupperi, 2010; Marvin, 2008, 68-101; MacGregor, 2007, 71-118; Kurtz, 2000, 17-19; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 31-37; Weiss, 1969, 182-202. In the High Renaissance, the print was more influential in the dissemination of classical art: Haskell and Penny, 1981, 17-22; Aymonino, 2015, 29-30, 41-42.

bronzes made from moulds taken in Rome by court-artist Francesco Primaticcio.⁴⁹ Between 1532 and 1540, while also collecting genuine antiquities, Primaticcio obtained moulds of classical statues in Rome, almost exclusively from the statues in the Belvedere Courtyard. By 1543, the moulds had been transported to France, where Primaticcio oversaw the casting in bronze of ten statues for Fontainebleau, including the ‘*Cleopatra*’ / *Ariadne*, *Apollo Belvedere*, and the *Laocoön* (fig. 102).⁵⁰ Vasari praised the king’s hunting lodge at Fontainebleau, site of the statues, as “almost a new Rome in France.”⁵¹ François’s example was emulated a century later by Charles I of England.⁵² But not all royal casts were made in bronze. In both François’s collection and, in particular, that of Queen Mary of Hungary, we find examples of plaster casts.⁵³

Why were these objects made? Partly, it was because a version of a particular statue was desired, and plaster was the easiest means – a malleable, readily-available resource, as it had been at Baiae.⁵⁴ Plaster casts were an economical means of transposing ancient works of art into a modern setting. But perhaps there was also an understanding of plaster’s distinctive appeal: an appreciation of its seductive capacity to embody a marble original while forever remaining distinct.⁵⁵ The prominence given to plaster casts in Mary of Hungary’s collection makes it clear that they were felt to be equivalent, almost, to actual antiquities.⁵⁶ Plaster casts were the next best way of ‘owning’ antiquities, in the absence of originals.

In this respect, plaster casts were distinct from the sculpted copies which also became popular throughout Europe from the Renaissance.⁵⁷ Casts and copies might seem to play similar roles in the niches and beauty spots of aristocratic homes – both functioning as substitutes for the best ancient statues. But whereas copies were usually the work of named sculptors, and could be scaled up or down depending on a patron’s requirements, plaster casts from the antique

⁴⁹ On Primaticcio’s casts, see Cupperi, 2010, especially 81-85; MacGregor, 2007, 76, 89; Boucher, 1981; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 1-6; Pressouyre, 1969, 223-239.

⁵⁰ Cooper, 2013, 145.

⁵¹ *che fece in detto luogo quasi una nuova Roma*: Vasari, 1987b, 144.

⁵² MacGregor, 2007, 90; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 31-35. Cf. on Charles I as collector, Kurtz, 2000, 41.

⁵³ Primaticcio’s moulds were obtained by sculptor Leone Leoni for Queen Mary of Hungary; plaster casts were produced, including versions of the Vatican *Nile* and ‘*Ariadne*’ / *Cleopatra*, for Mary’s garden at Binche: Cupperi, 2010, 82-85, 93-95; MacGregor, 2007, 89-90; Boucher, 1981; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 5.

⁵⁴ MacGregor, 2007, 90.

⁵⁵ For Renaissance conceptions of plaster’s dual approximation of, and inferiority to, marble, see Marchand, 2007, 217-220.

⁵⁶ Cupperi, 2010, 85.

⁵⁷ On the close relationship between casts and copies from the Renaissance, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 32-38; cf. *ibid.*, 122-124; and in the eighteenth century, Coltman, 2006, 123-161.

were dependent on the real statues – they were, in theory, ‘carbon copies’ rather than creative variations. Through the absence they embodied, plaster casts led the viewer, inevitably, to Rome and the real statues in the Belvedere Courtyard – casts were ghostly forms, cinematic projections. Seen like this, it becomes clear why the casts might even be favoured over antiquities or marble copies, as in the later array of statues in the eighteenth-century Marble Hall at Kedleston, Derbyshire – a neoclassical remodelling of the Pantheon (fig. 103).⁵⁸

3.3 Plaster casts in academies

Our third historical ‘snapshot’ is the role of the plaster cast in academies – the context in which the plaster cast became synonymous with classical art and the human form. Collections of casts – both from life and from antiquities – were an increasingly prominent feature of the workshops or *botteghe* of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian artists, the forerunners to academies.⁵⁹ By 1557, we find the theoretician Ludovico Dolce proclaiming that artists should draw from the antique rather than simply from life;⁶⁰ and Vasari recounting how Andrea Mantegna was made by his tutor Francesco Squarcione to “study from casts taken from antique statues”.⁶¹ In 1587 Giovanni Battista Armenini likewise advised students to draw from casts of the pre-eminent statues in Rome: “we shall place before you as principal models some of the most famous ancient sculptures which most closely approach the true perfection of art and are still intact in our own days.”⁶² Conceding that travel to Rome is not necessarily possible, Armenini recommends the use of wax or plaster casts: “if those parts that are modelled in gesso from these works can be obtained, they are better without doubt since every detail is there precisely as in the marble, so that they can be scrutinised and serve

⁵⁸ Marvin, 2008, 93; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 87. On private collections in eighteenth-century England, see Coltman, op. cit.; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 85-88.

⁵⁹ Ames-Lewis, 2000, 46-58, 79-85; Aymonino, 2015, 22, 31-33; Gallo, 2015, 161-162; Marchand, 2010, 61-62; Marchand, 2007, 207-210; Weiss, 1969, 180-182. On life-casting see n. 15. On fifteenth-century uses of antique models, see Fusco, 1982, 183-184.

⁶⁰ Dolce, 1770, 127-132. Quoted in Aymonino, 2015, 69. Cf. *ibid.*, 31.

⁶¹ Vasari, 1987a, 241. Cf. Marchand, 207, 209-212; Kurtz, 2000, 2.

⁶² Armenini, 1977, 130. Cf. Orfeo Boselli in the mid-seventeenth-century: young sculptors should begin by copying fragments from the Antique, then progress to entire figures: *non si può leggere senza prima saper le lettere* (“you cannot read without first knowing the letters”): Boselli, 1978, 13. Cf. Alberti, 1972, 75, 96-97; Goldstein, 1996, 119. On the systemisation of art education in the sixteenth century, see *inter alia* Aymonino, 2015, 30-33; Goldstein, 1996, 10-36, 88-90, 36 Blunt, 1978, 137-159.

the student's need excellently."⁶³ Casts were felt to offer a better way of understanding real bodies than real bodies themselves, because casts could *mediate* between art and life.⁶⁴

From this time on, plaster casts were regarded as a distinctive class of object. With the foundation of the French Academy in Rome in 1666 – the model for the academies which flourished throughout Europe in the eighteenth century – plaster casts came to embody the reception of classical art, and the principle of learning from the antique.⁶⁵ Bridging antiquity and the present, plaster casts were the principal means by which artists aligned themselves with antiquity, but they were also understood as being distinct from the 'original' statues of Greece and Rome. As Vicky Coltman has observed, in relation to English collections of the eighteenth century: "the [plaster] copy was never identical in every way with the original statue. The act of reproduction inevitably meant the displacement of the original."⁶⁶

How was that difference manifested? For one thing, as at Baiae, an academic cast need not replicate an entire ancient model.⁶⁷ Often, as the above quotation from Armenini's 1587 treatise implied, casts consisted of 'excerpts' of larger compositions.⁶⁸ Certain academic casts of the *Laocoön* were fragments, showing only the central agonised figure of the priest, for example, or one of his sons (the artist and historian Joachim von Sandrart for example made an engraving of a cast of *Laocoön without his sons* for his 1680 treatise *Sculpturae Veteris Admiranda*; fig. 104).⁶⁹ In a still life painting by the Dutch artist Jacques de Gheyn II, *Vanitas Still Life* (1621; fig. 105), we see a miniature cast of one of the son's heads on a shelf alongside other plaster busts (one of Seneca).⁷⁰ Arguably, such casts gained in meaning or power precisely through their difference from the antique original, offering a concentrated and elegiac glimpse of the bigger composition. At the same time, as we have already seen,

⁶³ Armenini, 1977, 132.

⁶⁴ Marvin, 2008, 38-39; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 37.

⁶⁵ On the earliest academies in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 16-17; Aymonino, 2015, 19-41; Goldstein, 1996, 10-36; Dempsey, 1980; Pevsner, 1940, 7-15, 25-66. On the French Academy in Rome, and the academic collections which emerged throughout Europe from the eighteenth century, see *inter alia* Aymonino, 2015, 41-46, 58-61; Macsotay, 2014, 195-265; Grafton *et al.*, 2010, 817; Macsotay, 2010; Sedlarz, 2010; Marvin, 2008, 35-40; MacGregor, 2007, 90-91, 244; Kurtz, 2000, 125-132; Pinatel, 2000; Goldstein, 1996, 40-61, 139-146; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 79-84, 88-91; Pevsner, 1940, 17-24, 67-139.

⁶⁶ Coltman, 2006, 129.

⁶⁷ On fragmentary life casts, see Gallo, 2015, 161. Cf. Vasari, 1987a, 239.

⁶⁸ Gallo, 2015, 162; MacGregor, 2007, 89.

⁶⁹ Marvin, 2008, 44. On plaster versions of the *Laocoön*, see Zahle, 2010; cf. the bust and head of the *Laocoön* recorded in early inventories of the Accademia di San Luca, Rome: Aymonino, 2015, 32.

⁷⁰ de Jongh, 1982, 187-189; Heezen-Stoll, 1979.

the very condition of being a fragment links such objects with the classical tradition at large.⁷¹

Fragmentation was one respect in which the plaster cast had its own aesthetic value. More subtly, the plaster cast continued to be marked by a quality of doubleness. It might be held up as an example of artistic beauty, on the one hand, and as a functional item on the other – an economical way of collating different examples of ancient statuary in a single place. Instructive in this respect is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's account, in his *Italian Journey* (1816), of visiting a caster's workshop in Rome and watching "the exquisite limbs of the statues coming out of the molds one after the other. It gives one a completely fresh view of the figures. All the statues which are scattered over Rome can here be seen set side by side. This is invaluable for purposes of comparison."⁷² Goethe's observation is revealing because it balances the artistic value of casts ("the exquisite limbs [...] coming out one after the other") with their functionality – the fact that they allow easy collation and comparison.⁷³

Goethe's description also shows how the plaster cast came to encapsulate a way of seeing classical art. In the academy, the *form* and whiteness of ancient sculpture were venerated above its other properties (whether theme, find-spot, or historical context); and the plaster cast was an apt vessel for the transmission of classical form as a mental rather than material entity dependent on its grainy or polished marble surface.⁷⁴ This emphasis prevailed in academies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his treatise *De Imitatione Statuarum* ('On the Imitation of Statues'; c. 1608-10), Peter Paul Rubens for example counselled young artists to focus on the forms and not on the substance of the statues, and to avoid the "smell of stone" in their drawings ("For several ignorant painters, and even some who are skilful, make no distinction between the matter and the form.")⁷⁵ Classical art historian Miranda Marvin goes so far as to suggest that plaster casts in academies were abstract cyphers, cut loose from history:

⁷¹ Armstrong, 2005, 19; Lively, 2011, 112-113. Cf. Chapter 3, n. 8.

⁷² Goethe, 2000, 527. Cf. Marvin, 2008, 29; Coltman, 2006, 126. Goethe famously visited the Mannheim cast collection in 1771: Connor, 1989, 191; MacGregor, 2007, 91-92.

⁷³ Cf. Haskell and Penny, 1981, 28, n. 15.

⁷⁴ Goethe described the Mannheim plasters as *die herrlichsten Statuen des Alterthums* ("the most magnificent statues of Antiquity"): Goethe, 1863, 184. Quoted in Connor 1989, 191.

⁷⁵ Rubens, 1708, 140. Quoted and trans. in Aymonino, 2015, 71. See Cody, 2013. On Rubens's copies after the antique, see van der Meulen, 1994-1995. On the eighteenth-century practice of studying casts and statues by torchlight, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 102-106; cf. Aymonino and Lauder, 2015, 189-191.

Placed in cast galleries side-by-side with Michelangelo and Donatello, white, matte, and stripped of any context, the ancient works became quasi-abstractions, pure forms without history or individual identity. They were deracinated; no longer documents of their own cultures, they were transformed into a kind of neutral ‘Beauty’.⁷⁶

In emphasising the formal appeal of plaster casts, Marvin overstates the extent to which ancient statues lost their identities. As we have seen, the very value of plaster casts lay in their ability to manifest the most admired and unobtainable sculptures of antiquity, and to give material shape to the concept of the classical canon. It has been pointed out that the eighteenth-century painter Anton Raphael Mengs, for example, assembled a collection of casts in order to represent “the spectrum of artistic achievement rather than to concentrate exclusively on the pure and the ideal.”⁷⁷ But Marvin’s statement nonetheless usefully highlights the way in which the plaster cast had come to epitomise the reception of the classical. In academies, the plaster cast was authoritative (if only as a manifestation of “Beauty”, as she posits), but also economic and reproducible.⁷⁸ It encapsulated the idea of the classical as a paradigm to be assimilated and renewed, as both an ancient legacy and a modern inheritance.⁷⁹

By moving forward in time, we may see how the balance between artistic beauty and functionality ultimately tipped. The example of the collection of the Museum of Classical Archaeology in Cambridge reveals how the status of the plaster cast shifted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, amid broader re-assessments of classical art.⁸⁰ In the next section, we shall see how that shift would later make the plaster cast a powerful motif for artists in the twentieth century.

⁷⁶ Marvin, 2008, 36. Cf. *ibid*, 39. On the “picturesque” displays of the eighteenth century, see Bann, 1989b, 108-109.

⁷⁷ MacGregor, 2007, 91. Cf. Potts, 1980, 157.

⁷⁸ On ‘repeatability’, see Settis, 2006, 74-77.

⁷⁹ Marvin, 2008, 26. On the importance of not simply aping the classical, see Dolce, 1770, 131-132; Vasari, 1987a, 242-243. Cf. Goldstein, 1996, 124-125, 148-149; Aymonini, 2015, 27, 31, 61-62; and the excerpts from Rubens and Bernini in *ibid*, 71-72.

⁸⁰ Beard, 1994; Beard, 2000. On museum and university cast collections in Germany, see Connor, 1989, 192-197, 203-208; in England, *ibid*, 211-229; in Cambridge, *ibid*, 216-218; Kurtz, 2000, 209-210. On the broader status of the cast in the nineteenth century, see Nichols, 2015, 99-109; MacGregor, 2007, 245-246; Kurtz, 2000, 137-139, 193-227.

When the plaster casts which are now housed in the Museum of Classical Archaeology (fig. 106) were acquired for the Fitzwilliam Museum in the mid-nineteenth century, they were regarded as works of art. So much is clear from the letters concerning their purchase that survive in the Founder's Library, and from the casts' original presentation in the Fitzwilliam.⁸¹ One bequest of plaster casts was sequestered into an independent display, while others were integrated into a bustling and aestheticizing array which included real antiquities and modern works by, for example, the neoclassical sculptors Antonio Canova and Louis-François Roubiliac.⁸² Plaster casts were literally on a par with original artworks.

But by the time the Cambridge plaster casts had been moved to a separate museum for archaeology in 1884, their role had shifted decisively towards that of visual aids for archaeological study: they were proto-slides. The change in the casts' location and function reflected a broader change in attitudes in the late nineteenth century – away from a primarily aesthetic appreciation of casts as classical forms, towards a more 'scientific' view which underscored their difference from original works of art.⁸³ Some ambivalence persisted over how the objects ought to be viewed and used. At the 1884 inauguration, for instance, the artist Frederic Leighton extolled the casts as “art in her noblest form”. But such a view was already antiquated – channelling the ethos of the eighteenth-century academy.⁸⁴

The development of archaeology as a scientific discipline saw the progressive demotion of the plaster casts to an essentially utilitarian status. In the nineteenth century, as ancient statues were themselves re-evaluated (and in many cases demoted) through the comparative analyses of *Kopienkritik*, casts – increasingly regarded as mere copies of copies⁸⁵ – lost their artistic cachet.⁸⁶ The plaster cast continued to be defined by its dual capacity to refer to an ancient

⁸¹ Beard, 1994, 7-11.

⁸² Beard, 1994, 27, n. 59, n. 60 and n. 61. On the casts' early presentation, see n.a., 1853, 35-60. Cf. Beard, 1994, 25, n. 24 and n. 26. On the “decorative” displays at the South Kensington Museum and Crystal Palace: Nichols, 2015, 102-103, 106.

⁸³ See Nichols, 2015, 88, on the nineteenth-century dualism of “sensual antiquarianism and exacting archaeological approaches”. Cf. Schein, 2008, 79-80; Bann, 1989b, 102-103. On technologies of reproduction in the period, see Nichols, 2015, 87-124; Baker, 2010; Haskell and Penny, 1981, 122-123; Bann, 1989b, 111. Cf. Furtwängler, 1895, vii. On the role of photography in promoting Fiorelli's casts, see Dwyer, 2010, xi, 96-98.

⁸⁴ Leighton quoted in ‘Account of the Proceedings at the Opening of the Museum of Archaeology’ (including a verbatim record of the speeches given), *Cambridge University Reporter*, 25 June 1884, 964-979. Quoted in Beard, 1994, 2.

⁸⁵ Cf. Nichols, 2015, 100.

⁸⁶ On the reassessment of the ancient sculptures which Winkelmann had prized, see Grafton *et al*, 2010, 817-818. On *Altertumswissenschaft*, the new “science of antiquity” in Germany, see Marvin, 2008, 137-141, and on *Kopienkritik* (the comparative analysis of copies) and *Meisterforschung* (the search for lost Greek archetypes through comparison of their reproductions), *ibid*, 143-150; Marchand, 1996, 140-148; Gazda, 2002, 4-8. On the

statue and to its own status as a replica; but that dual capacity was now an impairment, calling into question the originality of the ancient statue itself, and conclusively excluding the plaster cast from the category of ‘True Art’.⁸⁷

Throughout the brief and inevitably sporadic history above, I have sought to demonstrate that the figurative plaster cast is a special category of object. It is special by dint of what has been termed its doubleness – its ability to embody an ancient model, while also professing its own fragile, reproducible identity as a plaster cast (a cast that is sometimes made explicit by the fact of the cast being a fragment). This doubleness has seen the plaster cast undergo changes in status and function: sometimes the weighting has been more on its artistic value, and at other times it has been defined as a studio or archaeological prop. But it has ultimately made the plaster cast a powerful emblem of classical reception, since antiquity.

4. Non-classical plaster casts? The Pompeiian casts of Giuseppe Fiorelli

In order to develop this idea of the plaster cast as essentially classical, this section turns briefly from the examples of classical or antique plaster casts analysed so far, to plaster casts of a dramatically different kind – those in which the classical statue has been substituted by a living (or dying) body. These are the casts made by the archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli in 1863 from the cavities in the soil left by the victims of the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 (figs. 107-109).⁸⁸ As casts of real bodies, roughshod and occasionally fragmentary, the casts from Pompeii are the closest antique counterpart (or ‘look-alike’) to Lucas’s *Muses*.⁸⁹ By considering the extent to which Fiorelli’s plaster bodies ask to be seen as ‘classical’, we may further the case for situating Lucas’s works within the historical category of the plaster cast. This is not to say that Lucas’s works relate to antiquity solely by dint of their resemblance to

legacy of *Kopienkritik* and its negative implications, see Perry, 2005, especially 12-17, 78-110. Cf. Mattusch, 2002, 106. For endorsements of the method see Pollitt, 1996; Hallett, 1995. Cf. Goldhill on Classics as a discipline in the nineteenth century: *ibid*, 2011, 1-9.

⁸⁷ Beard, 1994, 6-7; cf. Connor, 1989, 192; Kurtz, 2000, 196-197, 225-227. On the inescapable ambiguities of plaster, see Beard, 1994, 13-14; Nichols, 2015, 99.

⁸⁸ On Fiorelli, see Dwyer, 2010, especially 32-123; Dwyer, 2011; Dwyer, 2007; Hales, 2011, especially 158-165; Rowland, 2015, especially 168-173. For nineteenth-century appraisals, see Settembrini, 1863; Dyer, 1867, 23.

⁸⁹ Pompeiian plaster casts were explicitly referenced in *The Dog from Pompeii* (1991) by American artist Allan McCollum, an installation of multiple fibreglass casts of the ‘watchdog’ (Victim no. 8) discovered in 1874. See Bartman and Lawson, 1996. Cf. Loh, 2015, 167; Dwyer, 2010, 87-89, figs. 25, 42.

Fiorelli's casts. Rather, we shall see how plaster casts of real bodies replay and extend the doubleness of the classical plaster cast – as witnessed throughout this chapter.

What happens when the plaster cast in question is not of a famous antique sculpture – the *Laocoön* or the *Apollo Belvedere* – and we are left with a plaster double of a real body? Apart from their ancient origin, are these plaster bodies classical in any meaningful respect? In one sense, Fiorelli's casts might be said to have nothing to do with art: they are human remains, preserved in plaster as historical and scientific specimens, and containing actual fragments of bones, teeth and clothes.⁹⁰ A letter written by the Italian patriot Luigi Settembrini on 13 February 1863 to the *Giornale di Napoli* (published 17 February) counsels against seeing them in aesthetic terms: "This is not art, this is not imitation, these are their bones, the relics of their flesh and their clothing mixed with plaster, and the pain of death that regains substance and form."⁹¹ But as we have seen, specifically through the example of the *écorché* at the Royal Academy (a real body wrought into a sculptural pose and then cast), the plaster cast by its very nature eclipses categories – whether those of 'original' and 'unoriginal', or 'art' and 'non-art'. Fiorelli's casts are readable in multiple ways – as literal human remains, *memento mori*, or archaeological samples. But none of these precludes their artistic potential.

Arguably, the fact that Fiorelli's bodies are figurative plasters, combined with their mode of display, has ensured that they resonate as art objects.⁹² His use of underground cavities as moulds, into which he poured plaster of Paris, rendered the lost bodies sculptural. His use of plaster moreover created an automatic link between the bodies of Pompeii (already emblematic of the Enlightenment rediscovery of antiquity) and the classical bodies which had been transmitted through plaster casts for centuries. Settembrini's anxieties were justified: from the beginning, the casts were appreciated in aesthetic terms. Early responses drew comparisons with ancient statuary. The archaeologist Austen Henry Layard remarked of Fiorelli's cast of a woman fallen on her side: "Her garments are gathered up on one side, leaving a limb of beautiful shape. So perfect a mould of it has been formed by the soft and yielding mud, that the cast would seem to be taken from an exquisite work of Greek art."⁹³

⁹⁰ Hales, 2011, 163.

⁹¹ *Li non è arte, non è imitazione, ma sono le loro ossa, le reliquie della loro carne e de' loro panni mescolate col gesso; è il dolore nella morte che racquista corpo e figura.* Settembrini, 1863, 336. For an English translation see Dwyer, 2010, 51.

⁹² Hales, 2011, 154, 160-161.

⁹³ Layard, 1864, 172. Quoted in Dwyer, 2011, 52. Note the influence on Layard of Bulwer-Lytton, 1840; see e.g. *ibid.*, 442.

Echoing this comparison, the antiquarian Thomas Henry Dyer, in his *Ruins of Pompeii* (1867), equated viewing the plaster “statuary” with the experience of seeing the *Dying Gaul*:

The casts of the four bodies now exhibited in the street of Herculaneum are among the most impressive sights at Pompeii. There manhood in its full strength, and womanhood in its maturity and its early bloom, may be seen sinking alike under that fatal visitation. Nor has the spectacle anything of that repulsive kind which perhaps might strike us if we saw the bodies themselves. We gaze upon them as if they were so many pieces of statuary cast in Nature’s own mould, much as we do upon the Dying Gladiator in the Capitol, and pronounce it one of the finest statues in the world.⁹⁴

For Dyer (as for Layard), the plaster medium transposed the bodies of victims into the heroic lineaments of classical sculpture, turning real corpses into paradigms of “strength” or “womanhood” divested of sordid (“repulsive”) reality. The conjunction of art and nature embodied by the casts appears to fulfil the Renaissance theory of imitation – of art as both an imitation and idealisation of nature – that underpinned academic training from the Renaissance into the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ An account in *The Art Journal* effected the same transposition, proceeding from a survey of Pompeiian painting to reflect on the casts:

Four human bodies are shown [...] in liveliest attitudes of pain, despair, and coming death [...] Art could not produce anything more fully, effectively expressive, more thoroughly satisfactory to the artistic judgment, than these two figures turned away from each other, *at last*, in the final awful moment [...] At first it seemed as if two more figures of Niobe’s children, calcined by the volcanic fires, had been preserved in this first of museums.⁹⁶

Like all the human remains at Pompeii, Fiorelli’s bodies were open to interpretation, prompting conjecture as to their identities and attitudes.⁹⁷ But their peculiar capacity to elicit analogies with classical statuary may be ascribed to two factors – their plaster material and

⁹⁴ Dyer, 1867, 16. Quoted in Hales, 2011, 160. On this and other comparisons between Fiorelli’s casts and antiquities, see Hales, 2011, 160-161; Dwyer, 2010, 17-18.

⁹⁵ Goldstein, 1996, 119. Cf. Chapter 2, n. 141.

⁹⁶ Bayley, 1866, 129-130. Cf. Hales, 2011, 160. See also the 1827 account by Carlo Bonucci comparing Pompeiian victims with the *Niobe Group*: Dwyer, 2010, 17.

⁹⁷ On nineteenth-century interpretations of Pompeiian victims, Dwyer, 2010, 15- 22.

their style of presentation.⁹⁸ A journalist observing the casts in 1877 noted that Fiorelli and his assistants had taken care to remove bones which were likely to protrude, “so that the figure is not deformed” – an act of ‘touching up’.⁹⁹ The presentation of the casts in the new Pompeii Museum in 1875 (fig. 110), in a gallery of glass vitrines – where they were viewable in the round – enshrined them as objects of aesthetic, as much as archaeological, interest.¹⁰⁰ In 1888, Fiorelli enlisted the help of a sculptor, Achille d’Orsi, in making scaled-down editions of the casts.¹⁰¹ While it was not his intention to make works of *sculpture*, Fiorelli clearly regarded the casts as aesthetic objects; and as we have seen already in this thesis, ‘intention’ need not be the determining factor in a work’s effects.

In Fiorelli’s casts, therefore, the archaeological impetus to recover and preserve the past converged with an artistic method – one whose associations were indelibly classical. If we move from the physical composition of the casts to consider their *effects*, it is clear that, like classical plaster casts, they have a dual agency. That is, they embody an absent subject (to the extent of literally melding with the original skeleton and remains), while being poignantly distinct from that subject.¹⁰² Earlier, we saw how students were encouraged in the Renaissance to understand ‘life’ – the living body – through the ‘lens’ of the classical plaster cast; and Chapter 2 of this thesis examined the ways in which the sculptural body both represents and supplants the real body.

For a late-nineteenth-century expression of the same idea, we may turn to Théophile Gautier’s short story ‘Arria Marcella: A Souvenir of Pompeii’ (1852) – a source almost contemporaneous with Fiorelli’s plasters.¹⁰³ In this, the young protagonist – a French tourist in Naples – is entranced by a piece of coagulated ash which bears the hollow impression of “the curve of a beautiful breast and of flanks as faultless in outline as those of a Greek

⁹⁸ On how the casts also *affronted* artistic ideals: Dwyer, 2010, 49-50 and n. 14.

⁹⁹ H.W., 1877, 120. Cited in Hales, 2011, 163, n. 53.

¹⁰⁰ Hales, 2011, 160-161; Dwyer, 2011, 53; Dwyer, 2010, 98-99, 109-11, 114-116. Cf. on modern sculpture and the vitrine, Welchman, 2013;

¹⁰¹ Dwyer, 2010, 105-106.

¹⁰² They have the “presence” or “inherence” of human bodies: Dwyer, 2010, viii. On these terms, see Freedberg, 1989, 27-31.

¹⁰³ Gautier, 1995. Compare the elision of plaster cast and paramour in Wilhelm Jensen’s 1903 novella *Gradiva: Ein pompejanisches Phantasiestück* (*Gradiva: A Pompeian Fantasy*), famously analysed by Freud, 2001; cf. Goldhill, 2015, 25-26. On Gautier’s story, see Lively, 2011; Hales, 2011, 159, 163-164; Blix, 2009, 85-89. Cf. Chapter 3 in relation to the *Venus de Milo*.

statue”.¹⁰⁴ Like Fiorelli’s casts, it is an imprint of a real body that has been displayed in a museum case, and which beckons comparison with classical sculpture. When he visits Pompeii, the youth finds himself transported back in time to encounter the ‘real’ Pompeian woman of whom the ashen imprint is a vestige. Curiously however, this animate body appears statuesque: “Her neck had those lovely, pure lines that one finds nowadays only on statues”.¹⁰⁵ In Fiorelli’s casts, the fragile sculptural medium merges in a similarly literal way with the living (or dying) body; we might indeed see the plaster as an emblem of loss as much as of recuperation.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, the physical material of Fiorelli’s casts is instrumental to the way in which we interpret their subject. The effectiveness of plaster in channelling an ‘original’ subject (in this case, the bodies of Pompeians) works in tandem with the material’s ephemerality – that quality which makes it expendable, replaceable, and vulnerable.

Fiorelli’s casts, which have become symbols of the nineteenth-century rediscovery of Pompeii, are thus characterised by an interplay of presence and absence. They evince the quality of doubleness which has made plaster casts such charged embodiments of the classical. The art historian Silvia Loretì has observed of the emotive appeal of Fiorelli’s *Sleeping Man* cast (fig. 109):¹⁰⁷ it is a “a mighty metaphor for the double – and at times contradictory – existential possibilities of classicism in modern art: on the one hand representing a plunge into the quiet space of an imagined world; on the other hand, the returning ghost of an unattainable past haunting modernity’s ‘all-too-human’ unconscious.”¹⁰⁸ Moretti’s statement refers to a specific cast by Fiorelli, but it carries broad-ranging implications about the plaster cast as a category. The plaster cast, she implies, forms a bridge between the lost (or “imagined”) world of antiquity – a world which is present only as a “ghost” – and the “all-too-human” present.

¹⁰⁴ Gautier, 1995, 118. On Gautier’s real-life archaeological source, see Lively, 2011, 113 and n. 15, 117-118; Dwyer, 2011, 49; Dwyer, 2010, 9-12.

¹⁰⁵ Gautier, 1995, 137. Cf. Bann, 1989b, 112-113, for another nineteenth-century account of time travel.

¹⁰⁶ On nineteenth-century artistic responses to the casts, see Dwyer, 2011, 50-51, 56. On Fiorelli’s casts and modern sculpture, see e.g. Kirkpatrick, 1970, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Victim no. 7: Dwyer, 2010, 85-87, and figs. 21, 22, 24, 41. Ferdinand Gregorovius described this cast as the perfection of “sculptural expression”: *ibid.*, 1884, 100. Quoted and trans. in Dwyer, 2010, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Loretì, 2011, 17.

5. *Plaster casts in the twentieth century: arte povera*

Before returning to the examples of contemporary art with which this chapter began, I will look at works by three artists from the 1960s. They are Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jannis Kounellis and Giulio Paolini, key members of the generation of Italian artists who came to be associated with *arte povera* ('poor art').¹⁰⁹ These artists sought to dissolve the dichotomy between art and life through the deployment of non-traditional materials such as soil, rags or twigs. In 1967, art historian Germano Celant seminally defined *arte povera* as "a poor art, committed to contingency, to events, to the non-historical, to the present."¹¹⁰ Ironically, the classical plaster cast was a prominent motif in this new sculptural repertoire.¹¹¹

What is the relevance of *arte povera* to contemporary art in Britain? How do the examples of Pistoletto, Kounellis and Paolini help us to understand and contextualise the works of artists such as Lucas and Wallinger? These artists' use of supposedly 'poor' materials has been regarded as a precursor to the downbeat aesthetic of 1990s British art – particularly in terms of its use of ordinary, readymade materials.¹¹² But their works also make clear that the history of the classical plaster cast did not end with Modernism, despite the fact that the twentieth century has generally been characterised as the era of the plaster cast's marginalisation, as the collections of academies were dispersed or even smashed up.¹¹³

The tradition which began in the *quattrocento*, of casting from the antique, endures into the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ An example of a British artist who has made extensive use of classical plaster casts is Edward Allington. His installation *Victory Boxed* (1987; fig. 111), for example, consists of 99 plaster statuettes of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, cast from a replica and painted in blue and gold.¹¹⁵ The plaster cast is here miniaturised and multiplied

¹⁰⁹ The bibliography on *arte povera* is vast. See especially Celant, 2011; Cullinan, 2008; Lumley, 2004; Criticos, 2001; Flood and Morris, 2001; Lumley, 2001; Christov-Bakargiev, 1999; Celant, 1985a; Celant, 1969; Celant, 1967. On Pistoletto see Celant, 2011, 105-108; Goudinoux *et al*, 2000; Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, 154-161, 269-272. On Kounellis see Celant, 2011, 82-92; Bann, 2003; Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, 106-115, 248-251. On Paolini, see Guercio, 2013; Herrmann and Pietromarchi, 2013; Celant, 2011, 47-69; Disch, 2008; Bann, 1999; Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, 132-139, 258-259; Celant, 1972.

¹¹⁰ Celant, 1985b. Cf. Cullinan, 2008, 10-12.

¹¹¹ Bann, 2003, 36; Unterdörfer, 1998.

¹¹² On the influence of *arte povera* on British art of the 1990s, see e.g. Malik, 2009, 31-37; Hopkins, 2000, 238-239.

¹¹³ Frederiksen and Marchand, 2010b, 1; Malvern, 2010, 351; MacGregor, 2007, 244-24; Connor, 1989, 229.

¹¹⁴ Aymonino, 2015, 62. On the enduring impact of classical artistic training on twentieth-century artists, see e.g. Moore, 1981, 7.

¹¹⁵ See Watson, 1985 5-9; Allington, 1997. *Winged Victory*: Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 92, 333-335.

into a repeating cypher. Allington's uses of the plaster cast closely echo those of *arte povera*, in which the object was deployed in a variety of ambivalent or rebarbative ways. Such treatments help to show how the doubleness of the plaster cast – that very characteristic which had made it an agent and symbol of classical reception – could be harnessed to contemporary artistic concerns.

In the work of Michelangelo Pistoletto, we find an example of a plaster cast which plays very explicitly with its status as a symbol of classical reception. One of his most famous works, repeated in a number of different iterations since 1967, is the *Venere degli stracci* (*Venus of the Rags*; figs. 112-113).¹¹⁶ A cast figure has been placed in front of a mound of coloured rags. The statue is based on Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Venus with the Apple* (1815; fig. 114), itself a variant upon the *Venus de' Medici* – an ancient statue that found fame in the Uffizi in Florence.¹¹⁷ It may seem a subversive gesture – equating the classical goddess with a pile of laundry; reimagining Venus as a *lavandaia* or washerwoman. Both the cast itself, and its ancient referent, have become “poor”. For this cast is not even a ‘copy of a Roman copy’, but a cheap imitation of a ‘genuine’ plaster cast: Pistoletto's original *Venus* was a kitsch concrete ornament picked up from a garden centre, which he coated with sparkly mica to create the appearance of marble.¹¹⁸ Subsequent installations featured plaster casts of this model.¹¹⁹

But the installation also reminds us of the fact that the cast has always been an ambivalent object. Cheapness is in a sense its calling card. Why, after all, does Pistoletto use a cast in this installation? What does the plaster cast offer that an ‘original’ marble wouldn't have done (supposing, of course, that Pistoletto would have been able to use the original in this way)? Surely the value of the cast lies in its status as a mass replica – in the fact that it is an object drawn from an inexhaustible supply of reproductions. It a readymade or ‘found object’, akin to the kinds of ‘poor materials’ which earned Pistoletto's work and that of his peers the name *arte povera* or ‘poor art’. Through its cheap – even kitsch – status, the cast allows the

¹¹⁶ Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, 157. The version illustrated is in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: 99.27.

¹¹⁷ Haskell and Penny, 1981, no. 88, 325-328.

¹¹⁸ The original concrete figure is now in the Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella. Celant, 1967, refers to Pistoletto's *Venus* merely as a “body covered with mica”, as if its classical and statuesque aspects were to be disregarded. Celant, 1985b.

¹¹⁹ E.g. the version illustrated. In the version at Tate Modern, London, the *Venus* was made by stonemasons in Tuscany using Greek marble containing mica. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pistoletto-venus-of-the-rags-t12200>. Consulted 2 June 2016.

artist a way of suggesting that the *Venus* and the classical inheritance she personifies have become so ubiquitous as to be tawdry, if not meaningless.

But while Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* may appear to deflate the classical model, it also inevitably reinforces that model's canonical status.¹²⁰ His *Venus* is paradoxical – divested of dignity, and yet afforded a central place both in the composition and title of the work. She may have moved from the temple at Cnidus, via Roman copying, to the academy, to a laundry, but her status *as Venus* is undimmed, hence Pistoletto's playfully epithetical title. Even the apparently heretical act of turning Venus away from the viewer towards the mound of rags, may be seen as a nod to her ancient allure, accentuating her legendary rear view – the attribute that Pliny and other ancient authors described as irresistible.¹²¹ This attribute was still being lauded, and laughed about, in the eighteenth century – as we can see from Richard Cosway's painting *Charles Townley with a Group of Connoisseurs* (1771-1775; fig 115), showing the eighteenth-century collector and his friends admiring two alternative views of the same naked *Venus*.¹²²

Pistoletto's contemporary Jannis Kounellis tended to present assortments of fragmentary casts rather than a single iconic figure. But these reveal a similar deployment of the classical. In Kounellis's *Untitled* (1973; figs. 116-117), fragmentary plasters – feet, limbs and torsos – are laid out on a table alongside a stuffed crow. Shortly after making the work, Kounellis painted the casts bright yellow.¹²³ It has been argued that such a use of classical sculpture had no greater significance than his use of coal and other unrefined materials;¹²⁴ according to such a reading, the classical cast has become “deracinated” and potentially meaningless (as Marvin argued of casts in eighteenth-century academies). But does this concept of bathetic equivalence accurately convey the effect of Kounellis's assemblage? His arrangement of casts as table-top curios, exactly spaced as if in a museum display, arguably suggests a calculated strategy of disjunction: difference is *reinforced* rather than levelled.¹²⁵ Their very mode of presentation alongside a Natural History specimen invokes the classicizing format of

¹²⁰ See n. 133.

¹²¹ Pliny, *HN*, 36.20-21. Cf. Pseudo-Lucian, *Erotes* 13-17. See Chapter 2, n. 74.

¹²² Vout, 2013, 217; Coltman, 2009, 159-190.

¹²³ The work was originally accompanied by a performance: Kounellis sat behind the fragments and held an Apollo mask in front of his face while a flautist played a fragment of Mozart: Bann, 2003, 101.

¹²⁴ Unterdörfer, 1998, 131. For an opposing view, see Bann, 2003, 98-99.

¹²⁵ Cf. Giorgio de Chirico's 'Metaphysical' paintings. See Chapter 1, n. 120.

the *Wunderkammer* – also the model for Wallinger’s ‘The Russian Linesman’.¹²⁶ The bright yellow paint, a later addition to the work, may be seen as accenting (literally *highlighting*) rather than defacing the classical forms.¹²⁷ As in the painting of de Gheyn, where classical plaster fragments lay on a studio shelf, Kounellis’s casts are enhanced by their disjointed display, as if asking to be reconstituted. They become condensed indices of the classical.¹²⁸

For a yet more explicit presentation of the classical cast as a readymade object, apparently evacuated of significance, we might turn to Giulio Paolini’s *Mimesi* sculptures, begun in 1970 (figs. 118-119).¹²⁹ In each example, we find a pair of identical plaster casts – a pair of *Hermes*, for example, or *Venus de’ Medicis* – placed directly opposite one another. In their double format and status as a sculptural ‘readymade’, the *Mimesi* prefigure Wallinger’s installation of the *Dying Gaul* and its corresponding *écorché* in ‘The Russian Linesman’. Again, in Paolini’s works, the second-hand quality of the plaster cast appears paramount. He appears to present classical figures as examples of banal reproducibility: the Romantic antithesis of ‘original’ and ‘copy’ gives way to a visual tautology.¹³⁰ By contrast with traditional mimetic representations, these works are less about the relationship between art and life, than with the casts’ cyclical relationship with one another. The plural title, *Mimesi*, underlines the idea that each figure duplicates the other. Each is an archetype and an imitation in the same moment.¹³¹

But as with Lucas’s works, the classical title of the work affirms the fact that Paolini’s models, and his procedure of doubling, refer to the philosophical underpinnings of naturalism.¹³² As a replica, the cast is mimetic, even if mimesis has been turned inwards, in this case, to become a cyclical spectacle of art imitating art. His sculptural pairs moreover suggest how, in its seriality, the cast was capable of rendering its ancient referent both illustrious and banal.¹³³ The act of doubling is ambiguous: while asserting the function of the

¹²⁶ On the *Wunderkammer* and Surrealism, see Endt-Jones, 2013.

¹²⁷ Comparable is Yves Klein’s *Blue Venus* (c.1961), a fragmentary plaster cast painted blue: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1985.445.

¹²⁸ Cf. Kounellis’s *Senza titolo (Untitled)* (1980; Galleria Mario Pierini, Rome), in which plaster busts piled in a stack are separated by slabs of marble: Celant, 2011, 84-85; Prettejohn, 2005, 199-200.

¹²⁹ Bann, 1999, 172-184; Disch, 2008; Prettejohn, 2005, 198-199.

¹³⁰ Krauss, 1985, 162-168; Cf. Baudrillard, 2001; Bartman, 1988, 225.

¹³¹ See Bann, 1999, 184.

¹³² See Chapter 2, especially n. 1. On seriality in art since the 1960s see Loh, 2015, 167-169; Fer, 2004, especially 66-81; Buchloh, 2001, 94-97, 506-508; Rorimer, 2001, 154-193.

¹³³ On the capacity for reproduction both to reinforce and demote the ‘original’, see Haskell and Penny, 1981, 122; and Coltman, 2006, 133, in relation to serial reproductions in the eighteenth century. On reproduction as

plaster cast as a mechanical replica, it celebrates (through multiplication) the classical statue which the cast embodies.¹³⁴ Like Wallinger's *Dying Gaul*, Paolini's *Mimesi* reaffirm one of the defining qualities of Greco-Roman art – the fact that it was typological, and that imitation and seriality had their own aesthetic value.¹³⁵ What Paolini subverts is not classical sculpture itself, but the Romantic tradition of privileging classical sculpture as “self-contained, autonomous and whole”.¹³⁶

Through the examples in this section, I have demonstrated that the tradition of artists engaging with antiquity *through the object of the cast* prevails into the twentieth century, even if that engagement is more ambiguous than ever. The plaster casts of *arte povera* may appear throwaway and stripped of grandeur, but they retain the representational power that we have seen in earlier examples. The entire power of the works of Pistoletto, Kounellis and Paolini rests on the fact that the cast is (like all plaster casts) both a self-professed replica and a conduit of an absent original. The doubleness of the cast permits an engagement with the classical which is itself double-edged.

6. *Plaster casts in contemporary art: Lucas and Wallinger*

6.1 *Mark Wallinger*

This chapter has made a case for artists' use of figurative plaster casts as inseparable from the history of classical art. The plaster cast has played a changing yet crucial role in that history, both in the reception and evaluation of antique sculpture. It has thereby become a powerful embodiment of the retrospective glance to antiquity that we term classicism, and this continues to be the case even when the plaster is moulded from a real body (as in Fiorelli's plasters) rather than an antique statue. Through particular examples from the 1960s, we have seen that the history of the classical plaster cast does not end in the twentieth century. The object continued to offer artists fertile material precisely because of its classical identity.

assigning force to the original, see Schwartz, 1996, 140, 211 (*contra* Benjamin, 2002); and in the context of Victorian casts, Nichols, 2015, 102; and in the context of modern art, Krauss, 1986; and Krauss, 1989.

¹³⁴ Cf. Prettejohn, 2005, 298-299: Paolini's doubling enhances *contrapposto*.

¹³⁵ See n. 46.

¹³⁶ Prettejohn, 2012, 40.

Having looked at different iterations of the plaster cast from antiquity through to modern art, I will return now to the examples with which I began, Lucas and Wallinger.

What does the history of the plaster cast add to our interpretation of the *Dying Gaul*, and in particular Wallinger's use of it within a contemporary installation? It is of significance, surely, that Wallinger borrowed the cast from Edinburgh College of Art, and placed it alongside another object from an academic context – the *écorché* from the Royal Academy. Both were objects which generations of artists had studied and measured themselves against. We have seen how, in European academies, plaster casts represented an interface between the real body and sculptural form (an idea that is made explicit in the *écorché*), and also how they translated classical models into modern-day contexts. By incorporating these objects into his exhibition, and holding them up as personal touchstones, Wallinger was making a self-conscious nod to the tradition of artists drawing from antique casts. He was implicating himself within that history – raising the idea that even now, classical casts have a power and relevance in defining what it means to be an artist.

That power and relevance are easy to discern if we concentrate for a moment on the cast's missing arm, its anomalous and distinctive feature. Wallinger has taken a celebrated example of Hellenistic sculpture – a paragon of ancient art – but this particular version has a piece missing. The effect is to intensify what is inherent in all figurative plaster casts: the object simultaneously channels an absent 'original' and announces itself as something plainly 'other'. The missing arm throws into relief the ambivalence or doubleness of the plaster cast, as we have traced through multiple examples from antiquity onwards. At one level, the gap lays bare the object's status as a modern replica – as something hollow, lightweight, and (in its state of breakage) throwaway. Whereas the solid marble of the original statue would have collapsed through such fragmentation, the plaster figure – supported internally by a metal armature – remains upright. The cast announces its own artifice.

In another sense, however, the cast's imperfection – a sign of its materiality – may be said to intensify its pathos.¹³⁷ Wallinger refers to the original sculpture in the Capitoline Museum as “one of those key images of suffering and of pity”; and certainly the Edinburgh cast channels the emotive form of the original. We might compare the way in which Pistoletto's *Venus*

¹³⁷ Cf. the missing arm of Fiorelli's 'soldier', Victim no. 1: Dwyer, 2010, 57-59, and figs. 5-8.

continued to embody the beauty and allure of her neoclassical and classical archetypes, despite being conspicuously different. Yet the missing arm also imparts the object with its own quality of “pity”, professing the cast’s status as an insubstantial after-trace. The tragic subject and the fragile material work through one another, as we saw with Fiorelli’s plasters. While it embodies a subject, the fractured plaster also effects a kind of disembodiment – signalling the role of the cast as “the returning ghost of an unattainable past”.¹³⁸

As Wallinger himself has stated, the fact that the statue is missing its arm demands an active engagement on the part of the viewer.¹³⁹ Anyone looking at the figure “empathetically” fills the body in; and that action of “filling in” moreover calls to mind the historical role of casts themselves, as fill-ins for what is missing. Indeed, the gap in the figure invites every viewer to undertake an act of archaeological reconstruction, intervening in the history of the statue. Ultimately, it highlights the fact that no one really knows what the ‘original’ of this statue looked like.¹⁴⁰ (The Hellenistic marble is itself considered to be a Roman version of an older Pergamene bronze original; and the supporting arm of the ‘marble’ version may itself be a modern interpolation: Michelangelo has been improbably named as the restorer of the work).¹⁴¹ We are invited to see the cast as one reproduction in a long sequence, without a known prototype – as a serial object akin to one of Paolini’s *Mimesi*.

As a cast, then, Wallinger’s *Dying Gaul* acquires new and autonomous meaning – it achieves its own paradoxical ‘originality’. The brittle medium renders the figure archetypally classical – even more classical, in a sense, than the complete marble version in the Capitoline Museum: it has become a fragment, and, therefore, speaks of the classical tradition across time and space. As in the examples we have seen throughout this chapter, the figurative plaster achieves a dual, indeed contradictory, effect. Even as it announces its ‘fakeness’, it intensifies the pathos of its model. It transmits the Hellenistic masterpiece into the present, while also asserting absence – both the sculpture’s physical absence and its historical lacunae (that which cannot be known about it). In this way, the plaster cast signifies both the endurance and the irretrievability of the classical past.

¹³⁸ Loreti, op. cit.

¹³⁹ Cf. Wallinger, 2009, 99.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Baudrillard, 2001, 169.

¹⁴¹ See n. 22. On Michelangelo having added the head, see Heyne, 1822, 169. Howard, 1990, notes the improbability of this: *ibid*, 252, n. 6; cf. Haskell and Penny, 1981, 224. On the statue’s restoration see also Stewart, 2004, 14; and Marvin, 2002, 207, who identifies the restorer as Ippolito Buzzi.

6.2 Sarah Lucas

In what ways do Lucas's truncated plaster bodies – the *Muses* she showed at the Venice Biennale – sit within the history traced in this chapter? First, there is the title: muses are emblematic of classical and classicizing art. The example of Hadrian's eight statues at Tivoli (figs. 120-121; which were acquired by Clement VII – entering the Villa Madama – and then in the seventeenth century by Queen Christina of Sweden, who arranged them in her *Stanza delle Muse*),¹⁴² is representative – formative, even – of a trend that would see figures such as Gustav III of Sweden seek to assemble similar groups. Lucas activates this history in her title – equating her real-life friends with the goddesses of classical myth:

I'd made a piece of sculpture years and years ago [*You Know What*, 1998] that went up in the fire [Momart warehouse, 2004]. But I didn't think of it particularly as being a 'muse' back then. For the first three [sculptures] – of me and Patricia and Michelle – we messed about with poses, and while we were doing it, I thought: it's not about being the most brutally crude you can be, although there's a bit of that. It's really quite a relaxed, feminine sort of thing. And so the muses idea struck me. Julian's [her partner, Julian Simmons] got this really nice drawing of three muses up north. He sent me a picture to my phone the other day [fig. 124]. That came to mind.¹⁴³

As Lucas explains, the immediate impetus for the *Muses* was an earlier sculpture, *You Know What* (1998; fig. 122; destroyed 2004) which had consisted of a plaster cast of her legs set atop a table.¹⁴⁴ But the idea of calling the works *Muses* came about through two different channels. In late 2014, Lucas was working with two friends, experimenting with different poses. This experience, a “relaxed, feminine sort of thing”, brought to mind the sister goddesses of ancient myth. Then she was sent a picture by her partner, which showed a print after a drawing by the artist William Henry Margetson, *Who Steps into Love's Dominion?*

¹⁴² Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, 88, no. 40; Nordenfalk, 1966, 576-579; Kurtz, 2000, 85. On Hadrian's villa, see Marvin, 2008, 175-176; cf. Bonami, 2013, for a comparison between Hadrian and Jeff Koons.

¹⁴³ Compare her statement in the catalogue for Sir John Soane's Museum: “My sculptures for the Biennale did have classical aspirations of a sort, in so far as Muses have their origin in ancient Greece. Also because we're accustomed to seeing classical sculpture incomplete, manifestly at Sir John Soane's Museum itself.” Lucas, 2016, n.p.

¹⁴⁴ Dziewior and Ruf, 2005, 146.

(1904; fig. 123). In this, three women are depicted on a shoreline, their arms interlocked and their flowing white dresses in various states of unfastening.

Margetson's dreamy depiction of maidens on the shoreline not only helps to contextualise the title of Lucas's series, but also suggests a way of reading her plaster *Muses*. While it may seem a trite piece of aestheticism, Margetson's picture is striking for its accentuation of form over content. The three figures adopt distinct postures and expressions, appearing variously demure, imperious and inquisitive; yet their narrative identity is unclear, especially in the version on Lucas's phone, which shows only a segment of Margetson's original composition (where a naked Cupid brandishes a bow at the women; fig. 124). For this reason, the maidens elicit different interpretations. They may not be muses at all, seeming equally akin to the willowy Three Graces of Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (1470s-1480s) or to the three goddesses judged by Paris in numerous works of art. They are aestheticized types – Edwardian instances of a long tradition of transposing classical goddesses into modern lineaments. As Shelley Hales has noted, “the nineteenth-century audience had met [Venus] in the disguise of mortal women from Eve to Paolina Borghese, seen her transformed in the paintings of Botticelli and Titian and even recognized her reassembled from spare parts in the stately homes of England.”¹⁴⁵

Casting mortal women as mythological types, Lucas's *Muses* also deserve to be understood in relation to this tradition. Like the three maidens of Margetson's picture, they might as easily be regarded as modern-day *Venuses*. The interpretation is lent weight by the way in which Lucas isolates their poses and attributes: the elimination of each figure's head and top half may be seen to concentrate her gesture and gender. In this regard, fragmentation achieves something similar to Pistoletto's turning-around of his *Venus*. What appears a diminishment of the model is also an act of magnification. This is clear from the ‘Muse’ *Patricia* (2013; fig. 86), in which the entire body is compressed into an attitude: a pair of crossed legs rests against a table, transmitting a mood of simultaneous casualness and vulnerability. One leg is weight-bearing, the other relaxed and with the foot turned onto its side, in a loose approximation of the *Venus de' Medici*'s asymmetric pose. The attenuation of the figure is

¹⁴⁵ On the ‘Victorian Venus’, see Hales, 2002, 260-268. On Venus as a type, emblematised by the Aphrodite of Cnidus, see *ibid*, 2002, 256-257.

counterbalanced by a powerful and precise evocation of that figure – of her pose and her anatomy, and (as with *Venuses* since antiquity) her posterior.

Ultimately, it is in the plaster material that the contrast between absence and presence is most vividly expressed. The disjunction that each of Lucas's works conveys, between embodiment and disembodiment, is reflected in (and intensified by) their material. As in the academies of the Renaissance and after, the use of unadorned white plaster has – on the one hand – an abstracting effect: it serves to highlight (and, in a sense, to de-contextualise) the anatomical and sculptural *form* of the models, announcing its own difference from those models. But on the other hand, the plaster continues to channel its subject, which in this instance is not classical sculpture but the real body. In its capacity to embody a human model, down to the finest details, the plaster constitutes a tangible human presence as much as an abstract projection. It softens the very distinction between 'real' anatomy and sculpture.

In Lucas's *Muses*, as with Fiorelli's casts, the inherent doubleness of the classical plaster cast – its capacity to refer both to an absent original and to its own status as a multiple – is thus transposed onto the real body, and plays out in a different way. Precisely because they do not refer to classical statues, Lucas's *Muses* help to show how the medium and category of the plaster cast itself binds her works into a classical tradition of making and thinking about art. Above all, her works play upon the unstable nature of plaster as a material (its provisional appearance and reproducibility) while harnessing its power to embody. At one level, each *Muse* professes its own brittle materiality; Lucas has left traces of her rough working process in the seams – residues of her waste moulds – which run down the plaster legs. Each figure thus remains provisional in appearance – a working model (we might compare the ways in which the cast has frequently been considered secondary or substitutive). Yet Lucas's works also exploit the expressive power of plaster – its ability to replicate a body (whether sculptural or real) more closely than any artistic 'copy'.

As with Fiorelli's casts, moreover, the plaster material impacts on the way in which the bodies are interpreted: there is a subtle interplay between the corporeality of the *Muses* and the materiality of the plaster casts. The plaster – and the body that it gives form to – is 'pure' and 'statuesque'; but it is also rough and ready. As we saw from the example of *Patricia*, the *Muses* seem poised between different states – robust yet vulnerable; granular yet spectral. A number of critics of the exhibition in Venice observed how Lucas's plasters, for all their

subversion and literalism, appealed to a traditional mode of classicism – connoting beauty as a kind of abstract ideal – as if the white plaster material couldn't *but* elevate real bodies into classical forms.¹⁴⁶ In other words, Lucas's plasters beckoned analogies with classical sculpture in the same way as Fiorelli's. As the artist herself acknowledges in the quotation above, the works reconcile a quality of 'crudeness' with a gentler mood of "femininity". As with Pistoletto's *Venus*, what appears to be subversive and expendable is also a graceful classical form.

In Lucas's *Muses*, then, it is possible to trace the same complex interplay we have witnessed throughout this chapter between representational force and material fragility. Whether in Baiae or the Renaissance or the Italian art of the 1960s, this element of *contrariness* has been a defining feature of the plaster cast – allowing it to 'body forth' the classical while also signalling the absence of the classical 'original', and affirming the *gap* between antiquity and the present. In the examples we saw earlier, from monarchical or academic collections, the plaster cast's overt reference (to a famous sculpture) coincided with its adaptability to its immediate context and era. The cast could be both ancient *and* modern. Lucas's works invoke and invert this process: the plaster cast alludes overtly to ordinary reality, and yet the medium of plaster itself qualifies that ordinariness – investing it with the aura of history and tradition which were present in earlier *classical* examples. As the dual examples of Fiorelli's casts and Lucas's *Muses* show, the mediatory role of the cast – its ability to straddle past and present – becomes all the more emotive when applied to a real body.

Aside from the classicizing title of Lucas's *Muses*, then, the plaster material activates the history which we have traced in this chapter. The initial appearance of her works – absurd, abject, and divorced from the classical world – belies their close relationship with the classical plaster cast as it has functioned throughout history. It is the plaster cast as a class of object, over and above the subject matter, which qualifies for serious consideration as classical. The figurative plaster cast continues to function as an agent of classical reception, even when the theme of a work appears defiantly or abjectly 'contemporary'. This was evidenced by the decision of Sir John Soane's Museum in London to exhibit three of the *Muses* within one of its neoclassical rooms, close to its celebrated collection of classical

¹⁴⁶ Januszczak, 2015; Sooke, 2015.

plaster casts, in early 2016.¹⁴⁷ The museum's press release stated: "Lucas's contemporary bodies will here be set in a powerful dialogue with the Soane's intimate spaces and extensive collection of classical casts". In the Soane Museum's installation, the idea that was implicit in Lucas's title becomes manifest: her plaster casts, like all plaster casts, reach out to the longer history of plaster reproductions.

Seen in the *longue durée* context of this chapter, Lucas's sculptures confirm the idea that if they ask to be counted as 'art', plaster casts are inescapably classical in their associations. As with the other 'lenses' in this thesis, the plaster cast offers a new way of understanding the art of the 1990s and after, showing that 'contemporary' art is not ahistorical. By the same token, the 'classical' transcends any specific historical moment or location, and is constituted as much from its snowballing accretions as from its foothold in ancient Greece and Rome.

7. Conclusion

Miranda Marvin has drawn a distinction between "the antique" (classical art surviving in the present) and "the ancients" (the long-dead artists celebrated in Greek and Roman literature), arguing that this description became increasingly marked among connoisseurs of classical art from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁸ In this chapter, we have seen how that distinction – or disjunction – between the classical *as it survives*, and the lost world of antiquity, is nowhere more apparent than in the plaster cast. The cast has grown into an index of the classical – displaced in time, vestigial by its nature, and yet immediately and tangibly present.

In various contexts and periods since antiquity, the plaster cast has been understood as a twofold object. We have seen how this identity, which evolved in antiquity and endures in the present, has made the plaster cast a singularly powerful emblem and agent of classical reception. Wallinger's plaster cast of the *Dying Gaul* manifests what is inherent in all plaster casts – they transmit the iconography (and with it, the theme and pathos) of an earlier model; and yet they also speak of that model's reproducibility and of their own provisional status as casts. They might be regarded as works of art – invested with the power of an original – and

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Marc Quinn, 2017: Chapter 1, n. 165. On Soane's casts see Connor, 1989, 197-200; Vermeule, 1953.

¹⁴⁸ Marvin, 2008, 26-27.

at the same time as unoriginal substitutes. In the *Muses* of Lucas, we see how the contradictory character of the plaster cast – the very essence of its classicism – continues to provide the contemporary artist with a versatile and provocative medium. The plaster cast – and its continued prominence in contemporary art – asks us to re-examine the history of classical art, showing that, far from being a remote and stable entity, that history is continually being reshaped – or recast – in the present.

Conclusion

In this thesis, we have seen how contemporary art in Britain asks for admission into the classical artistic tradition. Despite the fact that contemporary artists may avoid classical references, or renounce classical models, their works gain in meaning and complexity *as artworks* when considered in relation to ideas which were born in antiquity, and carried through time – by material and literary culture – from at least the Renaissance into the present. And as we saw in the Introduction, any vaunted rejection of the classical does not render the classical irrelevant or powerless. As Erwin Panofsky has observed: “In history as well as in physics time is a function of space, and the very definition of a period as [...] a phase marked by a ‘change in direction’ implies continuity as well as dissociation.”¹ The aim of the thesis has been not only to throw new light on the historical depth and resonance of contemporary art, but also, by plumbing that depth, to generate new awareness of the enduring relevance of the classical artistic tradition – envisioning that tradition as living and mobile and (in Panofsky’s sense) *continuous*, rather than circumscribed by ancient *loci* or curtailed by, for example, the advent of Modernism.

In terms of its methodology, this thesis has adopted an approach akin to classical reception studies which, curiously perhaps, have been underutilised in the field of Art History.² The fact that contemporary British art lacks any substantial scholarly study, to the point of having been ‘left out’ of Art History, provides further rationale for re-evaluating contemporary art under this rubric. Throughout the thesis, reception has been understood “dialogically”, that is, as casting new light on both classical antiquity and contemporary art, and thereby bringing nuance not only to ancient casts from Baiae, for example, or to a story from Ovid, but also to the artworks of Lucas, Quinn, Gilbert & George, Hirst, and Wallinger.³ Significantly, this approach has allowed the thesis to concentrate on the ‘agency’ of artworks (whether modern or ancient) in the moment of their reception, and by dint of this, to elucidate those artworks’ place within (as we called it in Chapter 2) the “historical imagination”.⁴

¹ Panofsky, 1960, 3. Cf. Panofsky, 1969, 19-20.

² See however Prettejohn, 2012, 32-37; Martindale, 2007; Barrow, 2005, 344-345; Bal, 1999. See also Chapter 1, n. 11, n. 29, n. 177.

³ Martindale, 2013, 171.

⁴ On agency, see Chapter 1, n. 4, n. 160-162; Chapter 3, n. 226.

Art's ability to resonate across time, beyond its original historical moment, is as true of contemporary art as of ancient. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the first exponents of reception theory, argued against attempts at "objective" historicist readings of texts, in terms which supply this thesis with its guiding rationale: "historicism failed to recognize that the aesthetic character of its texts – as a hermeneutic bridge denied to other disciplines – is that which makes possible the historical understanding of art across the distance in time in the first place, and which therefore must be integrated into the execution of the interpretation as a hermeneutic premise."⁵ This thesis has sought to understand the "aesthetic character" of artworks in terms of their capacity to act on the viewer in the present tense, but equally their ability to deepen our "historical understanding of art across the distance in time", thus steering a course between 'presentism' and 'historicism'.⁶

We have seen first how the classical artistic tradition has been characterised by art historians as a kind of 'treasure hunt': ancient texts, motifs and places have been identified or 'discovered' in works of post-classical art. But this search for classical *content* misunderstands the way in which tradition (as derived from *traditio*, 'handing across') constitutes a context for understanding works of art unbound from the strictures of specific time or place. Tradition is better seen as an active and ongoing transaction between past and present – an ever-shifting set of conditions in which artworks evolve in meaning, 'handing across' signification to one another. Contemporary art, through its apparent indifference to (or disavowal of) the classical past, arguably helps us to understand tradition in these expanded terms. We have seen, for instance, how the meanings of contemporary artworks transcend what their authors intended – indeed, how contemporary artists actively downplay or deny 'intention' in favour of openness and multivalence. We have moreover seen how the same quality of openness attaches to ancient artworks, by dint of their fragmentariness or lack of provenance, and more fundamentally, to the classical tradition itself.

Mark Wallinger offers a useful sense of the classical as an 'expanded field' (to adopt Rosalind Krauss's seminal description of postmodern art),⁷ when he remarks:

I'm not sure it's the classical itself which art has kicked against.
I think where there's a received opinion or wisdom which seems

⁵ Jauss, 1982, 146.

⁶ Cf. Martindale, 2013, 171.

⁷ Krauss, 1979.

to have gone unchallenged for a time, then writers and artists are inclined to point this out, and say, “hang on, have you looked at it like this?” In one sense you could call a new movement within sculpture ‘Minimalism’, but you could also say that it’s incredibly classical, in the end, because it’s all about proportion and scale. It’s probably more classical than anything – because it seeks to strip the ‘neo’ out of ‘neoclassicism’.⁸

Throughout this thesis, we have seen how the classical – once liberated from a hypostasizing category such as ‘neoclassicism’ – acts as a frame of reference for understanding contemporary art (Wallinger’s argument about the classical basis of ‘Minimalism’ might easily have been explored in more detail). The thesis has regarded the ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’ as two broad sets of coordinates, whose relationship cannot be boiled down to a single mode of ‘influence’. Certain artworks (take Quinn’s *Self*) do continue to draw inspiration from classical models; and several of the YBA artists who constitute the focus of this project have – in recent years – replaced the iconoclastic spirit of their earlier works with more traditional classical ‘references’.⁹ But even in these cases, influence is an overly-restrictive concept. It is for this reason that the thesis has concentrated on three different modalities – the principle of realism, the spectacle or theme of fragmentation, and the object of the plaster cast – which reveal shared ways of making and viewing art. Through distinct approaches, the chapters have shown how there is no single ‘route’ between antiquity and the present.

Through its use of classical ‘lenses,’ the thesis contributes to ongoing debates about what the ‘classical’ is – or might be – in respect to the contemporary world.¹⁰ Far from asserting the remoteness or redundancy of classical antiquity, contemporary artworks have been seen to correlate with – and gain depth of meaning from – ancient, Renaissance, and later artworks and texts, and their receptions. It is not simply that contemporary art helps us to arrive at an expanded sense of what the classical is, or shows how classicism (i.e. classical forms and stories) continue to pervade art even at an unconscious level. More fundamentally, this thesis has sought to show how – in the very attempt to accommodate contemporary art into the category of the classical – we may better understand what is ‘classical’ about ‘classicism’.

⁸ Interview with James Cahill, 16 November 2015.

⁹ This thesis might easily have concentrated on clear classical allusions in modern art – e.g. the Modernist classicisms summarised in Chapter 1, of more recent ones such as Damien Hirst’s 2017 exhibition ‘Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable’, Venice.

¹⁰ See especially Holmes, 2017a; Settis, 2015; Porter, 2006; Settis, 2006.

Above all, we have seen that classicism is not simply a storehouse of forms and themes, but (beneath those) a sustained way (or series of ways) of making, viewing and thinking about art.

This raises the question of whether *all art* (or at least, all western art – however loaded the term) might be defined as relating to the ‘classical’ in order to merit the ‘art’ label. Using examples as diverse as Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Duchamp’s *Fountain*, and Gilbert & George’s *THE SINGING SCULPTURE*, the thesis has nudged us towards this conclusion. But in arguing that the classical is less an entity than a process, there is a risk of rendering the category so capacious as to be meaningless.¹¹ As Jeremy Tanner has argued (building upon the work of Alfred Gell) in relation to ancient Greek, Buddhist and Christian portraits, art objects from disparate contexts may only be compared meaningfully in terms of their agency (with such an approach reinforcing difference as much as continuity).¹² Portraiture, he proposes, “can be understood as a [...] basic representational schema, permitting the search for intelligible covariation between particular practices and institutions of portraiture and contextual (social, political, and cultural) factors.”¹³ Where is the classical left amid this picture of difference? If we turn back to Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, in which “intelligible covariation” – a modulation between different periods and styles – is played out within a single canvas, this painting might be said to accommodate African art, archaic sculpture, Renaissance classicism, and Modernist abstraction. Seen like this, the classical is removed from its pedestal.

And yet this picture of artistic tradition as agglomerative and transhistorical, is itself a concept rooted in Greco-Roman antiquity. From this perspective, Picasso’s generic and stylistic ‘free play’ holds up a mirror to the classical tradition, rather than subsuming that tradition into something new. We have seen how the very idea of “intelligible covariation” is applicable to, indeed rooted in, classical art. Chapter 2 showed how ancient depictions of the human body varied in their degrees of verisimilitude, helping to reveal how ‘classical realism’ itself was (and is) far from being a stable and accepted standard. From this angle, we were able to see how modern-day works which seem to break out of the mimetic mould are,

¹¹ Cf. Morales, 2014.

¹² Tanner, 2007. Cf. Gell, 1998, 29. Cf. Tanner, 2006, 12-19 on ‘modernisers’ versus ‘primitivists’ among classical art historians – the former advocating broadly comparable concepts of art between antiquity and modernity. Cf. Squire, 2015, 309-12.

¹³ Tanner, 2007, 71. Cf. *ibid*, 91. The procedure is also indebted to Warburg’s *pathosformel*.

ultimately, reacting to and reinterpreting that mould. In Chapter 3, we saw how fragmentation appeals to the historical imagination with peculiar force, and how that imagination has been shaped by classical texts and marbles. In Chapter 4, we saw how artistic forms and modes of viewing have been transmitted and redefined through time by an object – the plaster cast – which has become emblematic of the classical artistic tradition. One way to claim that modern and contemporary art has a history, therefore, is to set its very openness and eclecticism (those qualities which might seem to liberate it from historical paradigms) within the frame of classical antiquity.

Beyond these broad structural conclusions about art's interconnectedness, it is also clear that there are concentrated and precise ways in which contemporary art intersects with the art and text of classical antiquity. While any artwork may profit from being thought about in relation to classical antiquity (Picasso's synthesis of world art and western art attests that the two need not be antithetical), the thesis has shown how particular modes of viewing and making art – above all those concerning the body and its capacity to be figured, evoked, or transformed through sculpture – reveal strong bonds between the art of antiquity and that of the present.

There are two principal reasons why the focus of each chapter has been sculptural – taking sculpture to include three-dimensional artworks of all kinds, from the *Apollo Belvedere* to Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child (Divided)*. First, sculpture constitutes the principal artistic legacy of ancient Greece and Rome, and has proved the most fertile store of material for artistic receptions of the classical. More fundamentally, the physicality of sculpture has helped to underscore this thesis's emphasis on the viewer's encounter with the artwork. We have seen how the ontological status of the artwork – its physicality or materiality (over and above what might be termed its 'content') – are of paramount importance in illustrating its relationships with ancient and classicizing ideas about art and the body. These are not qualities unique to sculpture, of course, but sculpture's physicality does powerfully assert the dual status of the artwork – its 'presentness' and 'pastness'. This dual status was seen, in Chapter 4, to pertain especially to the figurative plaster cast. Sculpture, through its inhabitation of the world of the viewer, foregrounds the process of reception as a present-tense encounter, and a continuously-occurring dialogue with the past.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. Chapter 1, n. 173.

In many respects, however, this thesis has also challenged the traditional Renaissance *paragone* between sculpture and painting. Despite its primary focus on figurative sculpture, the thesis has also shown how the different media can evoke – and work through – one another. To see Jusepe de Ribera’s painting of Marsyas being flayed, for example, is also to see a broken sculpture fragmented by chiaroscuro. Likewise, to observe the eroded surface of the *Venus de Milo* is also (as Pater and Rodin recognised) to appreciate the painterly play of light across marble. Such a minute interplay of media – the presence of painting within sculpture and vice versa – may be apprehended in contemporary artistic treatments of the body such as Marc Quinn’s *Self*. Contemporary artworks continue to complicate or even dismantle the *paragone* between painting and sculpture. In so doing, they offer a way of thinking about a larger *paragone* – that of antiquity and modernity – and how that too might be complicated or deconstructed. In other words, the interflow of media seen in our contemporary examples helps to support the thesis’s broader contention – that entire art-historical *categories* may be discerned within and through one another.

Some artworks benefit more than others, therefore, from being ‘read’ through a classical ‘lens’. They invoke the classical past through immediate and unavoidable resemblances of form or theme (for instance, Sarah Lucas’s headless *Cnut* and its similarity to the *Belvedere Torso*). Works of this type show that we cannot dispense entirely with the practice of ‘seeing’ classical models. The age-old practice of ‘seeing’ classical influence is not dead in the water – provided we move away from influence as signifying intentionality. For while they seem to conform to – and to elicit – a traditional mode of classicism, such works also powerfully disrupt that mode. As Lucas herself has posited, this does not render them meaningless or arbitrary: “things become classic [sic] because they’ve proved time and again and, relative to other ways, to work – beautifully.”¹⁵

In support of this broad contention, we have drawn precise and meaningful connections between the ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’ – revealing how works from disparate periods are bound together by force of analogy, whatever the artist’s intentions. This approach has revealed how certain contemporary artworks resonate especially powerfully with the stories, material states, or sculptural processes of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. To this

¹⁵ Lucas, quoted in Ruf, 2005, 30.

extent, the traditional method of ‘seeing’ classical forms and themes in artworks, which was analysed in Chapter 1, *does* have its uses – provided that we accept that those forms and themes are not necessarily concrete instances of unambiguous ‘influence’, but echoes that tease apart and distort ancient paradigms. The classical is not a trace element but a re-performance – an idea that is intimated by Lucas, as quoted in Chapter 2, when she questions whether “anything’s ever incidental”, before adding: “but we sort of pretend it is in art”.¹⁶ This thesis has asked what it means to ‘see’ the story of Pygmalion, for example, in a performance work whose authors claim no interest in that story. The answer has been that the work, in being viewed, invokes – and inflects and changes – a long tradition of artworks and texts which are likewise concerned with the relationship between art and life.¹⁷ That relationship has become emblemized by the Pygmalion story, although – as we have witnessed – traditional readings of Ovid’s text are often overly fixed in themselves.

In sum, we have arrived at broader, more inclusive, and more precise definitions of the classical *and* the contemporary, apprehending the ways of seeing which bind them together. This has been achieved not by isolating precise classical elements within contemporary artworks, but by situating those artworks back within the classical tradition. While *classical influence* is a moribund way of thinking about the relationship between the classical and the contemporary, the *influence of the classical* – as an historic layering of thoughts, forms and images – is enduring and essential in the art of the present.

¹⁶ Cf. Jauss, 1982, 145.

¹⁷ Cf. Eliot, 1919.

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For ease of reference, all Greek and Roman texts are taken from the Perseus Digital Library. All translations are my own unless otherwise cited.

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